CHALLENGE

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A SAGA OF INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

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Wishing the urgent and significant function a memorable triumph!

SONG OF THE REVOLUTIONARY

HARINDRA NATH CHATTOPADHYAY

You may hang me, you may shoot me
But you never dare uproot me
Since I belong to India dear earth
which dreams in me

I am heroic part of her
Being the very heart of her,
The blood that courses in her as the
blood that streams in me

O! I have loved her dearly
To the point of madness nearly,
I have loved her with my very life
a love that leaves me breathless

With worship unabated
I have ever dedicated
My body and my soul which have
through love of her, grown deathless

The brute who talks of slaying
My life is only playing,
With fire that is waiting to devour him
limb and bone

There's nothing truly sorrier
Than to try to scare a warrior

The people are behind him and
no warrior stands alone!

FOREWORD

A foreword is hardly called for in presenting the neglected story of the militant challenge over the years against the Raj (used in its liberal sense) for the obvious reason that the present volume is the first ever attempt made to draw the threads together and spin out the strands of the protest movement—a movement which in its earlier manifestations took the form of apparently sporadic but hardly unconnected series of armed revolts These were aimed not only against the Britishers but also at their henchmen—the landed aristocrats the money lenders the speculators agents sharks of all description eking out a sterile and precarious livelihood in the meshes of a deceiving society as Paul A Baran chooses to describe them the upholders of vested interests The movements were dominated primarily by agrarian discontent in some instances and in others by a series of positive political grievances In some cases tribal misgivings in other instances religious impulses and in still other cases economic and social distress supplied the main motive force to the periodical upsurges There is a spontaneity about them which grew out of a strong disapproval of the existing order That the existing order mainly emerged out of the predominantly *bania* interest of the Company *Bahadur* in the earlier stage and of the *Raj* of later days is too obvious to be emphasised In quite a number of episodes no doubt unifying or organised leadership was missing This only underscores the element of spontaneity at the grass roots level The motives generally speaking as observed earlier varied from time to time and from movement to movement But there was a common link running through and it is possible to conclude that the takeover of power from the Mughal by the British was at no stage taken for granted at the mass level not withstanding eloquent expressions at a little later stage by a section of the enlightened elite describing the British rule as a sort of divine blessing To the large bulk of the common people the new order was basically distasteful The increasing numbers of revolt some would say were largely expressions of sectarian

discontent That may be so and were so, in the absence of consolidated efforts involving all the elements who suffered, in varying degrees from the evils inherent in alien rule At first sight the movements may appear to have been unconnected But viewed closely, in spite of the spells of interval that stood between one outburst and another, these were not isolated episodes in so far as they emanated from a common determination to challenge, if not, to overthrow the alien regime Looked at from this context, the various phases of revolts and challenges worked together towards the great uprising of 1857 58 and the liberation movements following it

One thing however, has to be added here The literature on the 1857 uprising is formidable and People s Publishing House also brought out a volume on the occasion of its centenary edited by Late Puran Chandra Joshi a former general secretary of the CPI The subject is therefore not dealt with separately in this volume

The present volume is the first attempt to survey and assess the phases of the movement which earned a distinctive character of its own by virtue of its militant outlook and methods and took the form of challenges against the existing order and the evils emanating therefrom The survey presented in the volume, as its contents would show, is more illustrative than exhaustive It leaves out a number of phases whose claim for inclusion can by no means be overridden But the merit of the volume easily outweighs the lack of it It is we repeat a pioneer venture, aiming to present in one single volume the main currents that stimulated the growth of militancy as a determinant of our liberation struggle In the survey peasant and adivasi risings from 1765 onward receive due share of attention Nor are the recurring uprisings in the north east hill region and elsewhere in the country neglected Relative to the period up to 1880 s 12 papers appear in the volume dealing with such diverse episodes as agrarian upheavals Khasi and Jaintia rebellions Chakma revolt, Bheel insurrections Kol Santal and Munda revolts Rampa peasant war and Warli rebellion among others The Deccan revolt deservedly enough receives attention in more than one paper The heroic exploits of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, in particular, raised the cult of armed revolt to a stature neither reached be-

fore nor forgotten later Even the so called Wahabi movement receives an appropriate place in so far as it was a political one, distinct from socio religious impulses which sustained it at the initial stage

With the dawn of the present century, as could be naturally expected the challenge gained momentum in extent as well as in intensity The first decade of the century saw it assume a more pronouncedly militant and revolutionary character Slowly but steadily it spread beyond the shores of India and in doing so exposed itself to international influence While four papers trace the growth and discuss the prospect of the movement abroad, one paper is devoted to the development of politics and ideology of the nationalist revolutionaries Insights into the character of the movement and ideology underlying it during the four decades since 1905 06 are provided in analytical ways in papers on the Bengal revolutionaries, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, student movement in Bengal, peasant uprisings and response among the Indian army A number of informative papers relate to the great Chittagong uprising described as a daring conception, meticulously worked out and implemented with strict discipline the heroic battle they fought against the overwhelming force of the British army in Jalalabad hills will ever be enshrined as a memorable feat in the annals of our liberation struggle (G Adhikari— Development of Ideology of the National Revolutionaries' published in the present volume) It is relevant to recall here that the volume owes its planning to the initiative taken on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrated in 1980 of the great Chittagong uprising The striking events since 1930— the Sholapur uprising peasant upheavals in Bengal, echoes of the Quit India movement in Assam Bengal Tripura, Orissa and UP, the INA and the RIN revolt also receive due share of attention from both participants and scholars

Unfortunately the history of our freedom struggle, presented so far, the philosophy of peace and non violence *satyagraha* in a word as preached by Gandhiji has been emphasised to the near exclusion of the ideology that inspired the revolutionary upsurges, viz that of meeting violence by violence It may be an academically interesting but hardly important exercise to draw a line between the violent and the non violent characters of the

movement for, in reality, the movement itself, as a whole, was interspersed with activities of both nature, and helped India to win her freedom The Quit India movement is a pointer to its mixed character

Chittagong Uprising Golden Jubilee Committee, Delhi, deserves congratulations for having sponsored the happy idea of this exclusive volume highlighting the *other hitherto neglected stream* which sustained our struggle for freedom A seminar held in Delhi in 1981, as part of the Golden Jubilee Celebration is the nucleus from out of which the present volume has emerged Apart from being the first venture of its kind, the other merit of the volume is derived from the contributions by the participants in several outstanding phases of the revolutionary movement from 1930 onwards These will go down as source material for the re construction of the latest phases in our movement towards nation al liberation Our grateful thanks are equally due to the other contributors who have helped us to make the volume what it is Viewed as a whole, the volume is a faithful record not only of the militant challenge against the alien regime but also an index of the process of transition in its character from spontaneity to consciousness and then from nationalism to socialism It will largely fill in a void in the history of India s liberation movement and will be a welcome addition to our historical literature, relative to movements of protest, nonconformity and revolts by our people

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CALCUTTA-14

March 31 1983
Calcutta

PREFACE

Chittagong Uprising Golden Jubilee Committee Delhi is glad to place before the public the present volume As is evident from the title it is an attempt to present various phases of the armed and militant movement in our country aimed at the overthrow of the system represented by the oppressive British and other vested interes s

The committee thought that it would be fit and proper to cele brate the occasion by bringing out in one single volume the story of armed resistance to British rule since its establishment The committee also feels that while the mass movement initiated by Gandhiji has received the attention it deserves from our scholars and historians not to speak of official circles the story of the other stream that of armed and militant move nent remains to be told and appreciated in its proper perspective The great Chittagong uprising is not an isolated episode it is but a link in the chain of challenge that followed in the wake of the alien rule The present volume is thus an attempt at highlighting the various phases of the neglected but by no means unimportant story of our quest for lib ration through armed and militant struggle

This work cannot be claimed as an exhaustive treatment in deed the volume leaves out some phases on which papers could not be collected within the time limit under which this work had to be undertaken Notwithstanding these limitations it may be humbly submitted that the volume has at least the merit of a pioneer venture

It is a matter of deep regret that Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray who was actively associated with the project since the beginning as the Chairman of the Editorial Board did not live to see it through It also pains us to record that death carried away Professor Susobhan Chandra Sarkar before he could write the Foreword to the volume in kind response to our request Dr Sashi Bhusan Chaudhuri and Dr Gangadhar Adhikari who had enriched this volume with their outstanding papers are no longer

with us We offer our respect to the memory of these outstand ing historians and scholars whose death has left a void that can not be easily filled

It would be appropriate and relevant to mention that most of the papers published in this volume were originally presented and discussed at a seminar held in Delhi in 1981 as part of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Chittagong Uprising

However the views expressed in each paper are the author s own and not necessarily of the Jubilee Committee or the Editori al Board The committee records with gratitude the kind assis tance rendered by scholars who contributed papers well wishers workers and organisations of various categories

In particular sincere appreciation of the help rendered by the members of the Editorial Board is called for Professor Ajoy Chandra Banerjee who put his valuable time at the dis posal of the Board for doing most of the editorial work in connection with the volume and Shri Chinmohan Sehanavis whose academic pursuit got the better of his indifferent health Dr Hiren Chakrabarti who had kindly agreed to be in charge of the editorial work was prevented by his manifold preoccupa tions from doing this job Thanks are due to him for his advice rendered during the initial stage of the work Professor Nisith Ranjan Ray with his mature advice and Foreword contributed immensely towards this worl The assistance extended by Pro fessor Narahari Kaviraj (editing and collection) Nayanranjan Das gupta (collection) Dr Hitesh Sanyal (editing and collection) Dr Amalendu Guha (editing) Professor Asoke Mustafi (editing) Mad hab Munshi (editing) and Basabi Bagchi (press copy) is acknow ledged with appreciation Thanks are due in large measure to Shrimati Kamala Mukherjee but for whose never ending labour and enterprise in connection with the collection of papers the maintenance of correspondence and co ordination and keeping in constant touch with the Editorial Board this volume would not have materialised The Indian Council of Historical Research New Delhi has kindly provided partial financial assistance to the project The Committee is also grateful to Mahendra Dutta Rajes war Neogi Dr Nihar Sarkar Dr S Das Gupta Santi Ranjan Ba nerjee for donating funds to make it a success The typists entrust ed with a trying job did a splendid one of it

Thanks are also due to G J Rama Rao and Baren Ray for de-

voting time and energy to arrange the papers and organise the book as also for preparing it for the press

The book is divided into five parts, each of which is distinguished by a common theme

Part I, naturally concerns the Chittagong Uprising and Dr G Adhikari's article at the beginning provides proper historical-theoretical perspective

Part II deals with various peasant and tribal uprisings from the 18th century onwards

Part III is devoted to modern uprisings which complemented the Indian national liberation movement

Part IV consists of accounts of the 1942 movement and the various uprisings connected with it in different parts of the country

Part V recounts the role of the students the army, navy, air force and above all of the Indian National Army (INA) or the Azad Hind Fauz in our struggle for freedom from British imperialist rule

While each part is self-contained and self-sufficient, it is connected with the others They all depict how militant armed struggle complemented the non-violent struggle

I cannot adequately thank N Rajasekhara Reddi without whose interest constant encouragement and zeal this volume would have been inordinately delayed

Finally the people working in People's Publishing House and New Age Printing Press deserve profuse thanks for bringing out this book on time and in a short time Special mention must be made of the interest and efforts of Sipra Lahiri and Subodh Roy in this context

But for the initiative and keen interest of my colleagues and Committee members, the publication would never have come out

On behalf of the Chittagong Uprising Golden Jubilee Committee Delhi I fervently hope that the volume will be a welcome addition to historical literature on our liberation struggle and will encourage a deeper and a fuller study on this subject of absorbing national interest

January 12, 1984
New Delhi

KALPANA JOSHI (DUTT)
PRESIDENT
CHITTAGONG UPRISING GOLDEN JUBILEE COMMITTEE
DELHI

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Part I

Chittagong Uprising

DEVELOPMENT OF IDEOLOGY OF THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARIES

G ADHIKARI

When the national freedom movement had emerged from the petition stage in the beginning of the century the revolutionary trend miscalled 'terrorism' by the officialdom was an inseparable part of the national freedom movement The movement itself by then had taken a militant turn

This is proved when we take a review of the early phase of our national movement as it entered its first militant fighting phase (i e Swadeshi Swaraj and boycott movement from 1903 1907)

At the head of the national movement in this phase stood national leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal while at the other end stood leaders and cadres of the revolutionary trend like Arabindo Ghose and Kshudiram Bose There was no differentiation between the two which appeared in the later period This is proved by the editorial written by Tilak in the paper *Kesari* on the martyrdom of Kshudiram Bose for which Tilak was sentenced for six years (1908 1914)

The source of inspiration for the national revolutionaries in the phase up to 1916 was in the main the uprising of 1857 miscalled by the British the Mutiny and which in reality was India's First War of Independence Savarkar's book on the subject written in London around 1907 or 1908 despite its inadequacies natural to the period and conditions prevailing then did a great service in as much as it repudiated slanders and false historical writings on the subject by British imperialist authors It put the record straight It was immediately banned by the British rulers but circulated among the contemporary revolutionaries in India in laboriously and clandestinely prepared manuscript

It is significant that contemporary articles written by Karl Marx on this subject for the *New York Herald Tribune* remained unknown to the Indian historians for almost a century It is also

significant that the collection of these articles were published by Marx Engels Institute Moscow after carefully checking up the printed *New York Herald Tribune* version with the original MS of the same preserved in Amsterdam Headquarters of the 2nd International The complete copy now exists with the Marx Engels Institute in Moscow It is interesting to note that this book is also titled *The First Indian War of Independence—1857 59*

Politics and ideology of the national revolutionaries in this first phase was further moulded or influenced by the ideas of the French revolution or the contemporary actions of the Irish struggle for independence and the progressive ideas of the Left wing of the International working class movement in Europe and America (Refer to Shyamji Krishna Verma Madam Cama, Virendranath Chattopadhyay and Bhupendra Nath Dutta and also the early phase of the Ghadar Party in America and California, 1908 1916)

It is necessary to pinpoint the two weaknesses of the revolutionaries of the early phase of the movement (1) When the movement arose after the 1905 movement (Bengal anti partition movement) for the first time took it to a mass character though in the main restricted to the masses of the middleclass with the slogan Swadeshi Boycott and Swaraj the national revolutionaries in this phase of the movement particularly in Bengal were by and large under the influence of Hindu spiritual ideology This attitude became a sort of barrier between the majority of the masses mainly the peasantry who are predominantly Muslim in that state and the revolutionaries (2) The other weakness came out in the later *period of the phase when the first world war broke out and the* national revolutionaries began to develop revolutionary actions under the slogan Britain s difficulty is India s opportunity In this period various revolutionary groups working in Europe and America as well as in the Far East came together and sought to coordinate their activities for the purpose In India also the revolutionary groups from Bengal Punjab and elsewhere sought to coordinate their activities

In this period their effort was to collect arms to develop armed struggle and work inside the army calling upon the soldiers to rise in armed revolt For this purpose they acted on the slogan Enemy s Enemy is our Friend The aim of the revolutionaries

was to contact the Kaiser to obtain arms and German imperialists' help to 'liberate India For this Virendra Nath Chattopadhyay, Bhupendra Nath Dutta and Abinash Bhattacharya contacted the Kaiser They were dimly aware that this was a dangerous policy as Abinash Bhattacharya recorded that they tried to pin down the Kaiser to certain conditions which betrayed their illusion and their total lack of understanding of the nature of imperialism Similar ideas were also current in the Ghadar group in America at that time

The Ghadar Party which was formed among the emigrant peasants of the Punjab who had emigrated to California to earn their living as workers under the influence of leaders like Lala Hardayal In its early years before the first world war the journals, manifestoes published by them showed that their ideas were inspired by nationalism and were democratic secular and anti-imperialist In their fight against racial discrimination they were helped by the progressive section of the American working class This helped them to develop the above-mentioned ideas But they shared the mistaken ideas of the national revolutionaries as stated above

It was only after the October Socialist Revolution in Russia in the early twenties that their forward-looking leaders like Ratan Singh and Santokh Singh began to turn towards ideas of scientific socialism and realised the need for organising workers and peasants as the decisive revolutionary force in the struggle for national independence In 1922 they came to the USSR and had an opportunity to attend the Fourth Congress of the Communist International In 1926 Santokh Singh returned to India and started the magazine *Kirti* (worker) which later on acted as the organ of the Workers and Peasants Party in Punjab The two volume monumental work of Sohan Singh Josh on the History of the Ghadar Party records the transformation of this section of the national revolutionary movement towards Marxism Leninism The role of the Ghadar Party in the twenties first under the leadership of Santokh Singh and later under that of Teja Singh Swatantra in helping the growth of the workers' and peasants movement in the Punjab is very significant as recorded by Sohan Singh Josh in his above-mentioned book

Towards the end of the first world war the British imperia-

lists, taking a global view of the revolutionary upsurge in Europe and Asia and in the October Socialist Revolution bringing into power the workers and peasants under the leadership of Lenin and a revolutionary upsurge in India and China, evolved their post war strategy to combat the revolutionary movement in India It was a three pronged approach (i) Montague Chelmsford Reform Scheme giving miserable concessions to the narrow section of the elite e g some sharing of power in administration on the basis of election on a very narrow franchise (1917) (ii) A Commission was appointed headed by Rowlatt to investigate the revolutionary ferment during the war and to suggest measures for its suppression (Rowlatt Bill, 1919) (iii) The Amnesty (1919)

In 1919 popular movements demonstrations were launched for civil liberties for democratic rights against the Rowlatt Bill This movement, headed by Mahatma Gandhi got a wide all India support At that time the post war upsurge of workers and peasants had started in the form of the strikes of industrial workers and peasants uprising such as the strike of textile workers in Bombay and Madras the Moplah rising, Jallianwalla Bagh incident and a general peasants movement

It was in this background that the national revolutionary movement was thinking on how to meet the challenge of the totally inadequate Montford Reform scheme Mahatma Gandhi suggested after a lot of countrywide discussion a movement of non violent non cooperation Gandhiji s slogan was "A satanic Government that cannot be mended has to be ended" This decision to launch such a movement was taken in a special session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta and finally in 1920 in the session of the Nagpur Congress Gandhiji, realising that the *Left* wing national revolutionaries most of whom had been released on amnesty had acquired a big prestige among the people with considerable mass support decided to contact them It is on record that Gandhiji met these leaders at Calcutta in the beginning of 1920 and explained to them his idea of non-violent non cooperation requesting them to give him a free hand to develop the movement and not start any of their revolutionary activities for one year It appears that they agreed after discussion with Gandhiji (Subhas Bose—*My Struggle* and also *Gandhi Parikrama*)

Withdrawal of the non cooperation movement in 1921-22 after the Chaurichaura incident in which a mass of 4000 peasants after being fired upon by the police, attacked the Chaurichaura police station in retaliation and burnt it down, killing 22 police men shocked the Left wing of the national movement The national revolutionaries felt themselves freed from the pledge they had given to Gandhiji They began organising themselves for actions in the new situation

Reorganisation of the national revolutionary groups of Bengal seems to have begun in 1923 when a number of actions are reported mainly for collecting money for revolutionary purposes In those days severe repression was launched against these groups under the Bengal Ordinance which was justified by police bureaucrats as the only way of suppressing these groups without any lengthy legal procedure This is bluntly stated in an official report justifying the ordinance The main police officer leading this repressive campaign against the youth was Charles Tegart Thousands were jailed in 1924 Some revolutionary groups were planning for an action to liquidate Charles Tegart The action by Gopinath Saha, which was planned against Charles Tegart succeeded in killing another officer named Mr Dey Gopinath Saha was arrested and sentenced to death in the beginning of 1924 He was executed in April 1924

It appears that at that time many of these revolutionary groups and their sympathisers were simultaneously working inside the Indian National Congress as activists Thus the provincial Conference of Bengal Congress met at Serajganj under the presidentship of C R Das and adopted a resolution paying a respectful homage to the martyrdom of Gopinath Saha When this brief resolution in Bengali and in English appeared in the press it drew angry protest and criticism from Mahatma Gandhi At the end of the year, the annual session of the Indian National Congress met at Belgaum under the presidentship of Mahatma Gandhi It is on record that at the AICC meeting preceding the session Mahatma Gandhi moved a resolution condemning political murders To this resolution C R Das backed by the Bengal delegation moved an amendment whose wording was identical to the homage resolution adopted at the Serajgung conference mentioned above The amendment was defeated by a narrow margin (88 to 80)

Later Gandhi commenting on the AICC session in his organ *Young India* said This is not my victory this is my defeat

During this period both the Anushilan and Yugantar parties which were active in the earlier period seem to have fallen into passivity though the loyalty of their cadres to their respective leaders was not shaken The younger revolutionary elements of both the parties impatient over the passivity of their leaders and eager to strike blows against the brutal repression of the imperialists began to organise themselves into what is known as a new revolutionary party This reorganisation was taking place under the impact of the general crisis of capitalism the outstanding event of which was the victory of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia the defeat of the interventionist war against it launched by imperialists and the world shaking impact of the same initiating working class revolutionary upsurge in the capitalist countries and a new upsurge of national liberation struggles in the countries of Asia and Africa The politics and ideology of the national revolutionary groups arising and reorganising themselves in this period was strongly influenced by this background

It appears that the name of this new revolutionary party is Hindustan Republican Association We find the traces of existence of the party uniting the revolutionary groups in Bengal U P and probably in the Punjab During the 1925 1930 period leaders like Sachindranath Sanyal and Manmathanath Gupta seem to have taken the initiative to organise this party How united and monolithic this party was in uniting all its branches in this vast area is difficult to say It can be safely said that by and large the politics and ideology of this party and its branches was influenced by the ideal of the October Socialist Revolution and of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin which led it to victory It was also influenced by the Communist Party of India which emerged as groups in the early twenties and received publicity in its persecutions in Peshawar Conspiracy Cases (1921 23) and the Kanpur Conspiracy Case (1924) It is also influenced by the fact that outstanding revolutionaries who had played a part in the revolutionary movement in the pre first world war period like Virendranath Chattopadhyay Bhupendranath Dutta M N Roy (Narendranath Bhattacharya) Abani Mukherji and G A K Luhani had after October revolution coming in direct contact

with its leaders in Moscow, accepted the revolutionary ideology of the working class Their contact with the contemporary revolutionary movement, which was reorganising itself in the period mentioned above, has played an important role in shaping the ideology and politics of theirs This is proved by the fact that the new revolutionary party, i e the Hindustan Republican Association published its manifesto under the title "Revolutionary" in January 1925 and its contents The full text of this pamphlet is available in the secret confidential report of the Intelligence Department called Terrorism in India This pamplet defines the principles of the constitution of independent India emerging after the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism and feudalism It defines the goal as 'Federal Republic of United States of India which was a negation of British rule as well as of the feudal princes This is based on universal suffrage The reference to the idea of recall of elected representatives who betray their election pledges shows that the writer of the pamphlet was conversant with the constitution of the USSR One of the items of the programme put down in the same is nationalisation of all public utility services and steel shipping mines, etc

Repudiating the allegation that they are terrorists and anarchists they say that they are national revolutionaries and not terrorists and anarchists At the same time they defend individual actions against the terror regime of British imperialism It said "The Indian revolutionaries are neither terrorists nor anarchists They never aim at spreading anarchy in the land and therefore, they can not be properly called anarchists Terrorism is never their object and they cannot be called terrorists They do not believe that terrorism alone can bring independence and they do not want terrorism for terrorism's sake although they at times resort to this method as a very effective means of retaliation The present government exists solely because the foreigners have successfully been able to terrorise the Indian people The Indian people do not love their English masters they do not want them to be here but they do help the Britishers simply because they are terribly afraid of them and this very fear prevents the Indians from extending their helping hands to the revolutionaries not that they do not love them This official terrorism is sure\ to be met by counter terrorism

The pamphlet put forward the perspective of a society in which

exploitation of man by man ceased In this connection it refer red on the one hand (strangely enough) on the state of things of the Rishis and the soci il conditions under Bolshevik Russia

That the text produced in Terrorism in India by the Govern ment of India is genuine is proved by the fact that Sachin Sanyal in his book *Bandi Jiban* refers to it and quotes its salient points which exactly tally with the abovementioned text He comments that the pamphlet reflected the same ideas and pro gramme which the Communist Party was putting forward The searches and seizure of this pamphlet by British Indian police was reported in the contemporary Indian press This is recorded in the *Masses* (January 1926) a monthly journal published by M N Roy from abroad The quotation given by Roy in the article is identical with the lines of the pamphlet

The Bengal Administrative Report of 1924 25 said as follows regarding The Revolutionary A concise manifesto of the re volutionary party was widely circulated in pamphlet form throughout India It contained a direct incitement to revolution giving as the immediate object of the Party the establishment of a Federal Republic of the United States of India by an orga nised and armed revolution The extensive method of distribu tion of this pamphlet was in itself an ample proof of the wid spread organ sation of the conspiracy

The Chief Judge of the Oudh Court in his judgement in the Kakori Case (in 1927) quoted from the Constitution of the HRA which proves how the ideology and politics was influenced by the ideas of the revolutionary working class movement

This constitution set forth its objective as The object of the Association shall be to establish a Federal Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution It further stated that The basic principle of the Republic shall be universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make any kind of exploitation of man by man possible The consti tution defined its public activities as organising workers and p a sants in their respective unions and associations It spoke of organising workers in the different factories the railways and coal fields Similarly it said the Kisans must also be orga nised In this connection the constitution emphasises that the purpose of these organisations is to instil in their minds that they

are not for the revolution but that the revolution is for them.' It is significant that this stood at the top of each monthly issue of the *Masses of India* a revolutionary monthly journal published from abroad and edited by M N Roy The slogan means that the programme of the revolution as visualised by the Association must include concrete demands of the workers and peasants against their exploitation by the imperialists and feudalists In this sense the constitution goes a bit further than The Revolutionaries The date of this constitution seems to be between 1925 and 1927

The constitution of the party with committees at district and provincial levels and with a Central Council at the all India level to a certain extent, showed that the party was organised on the principles of democratic centralism Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar who himself made a transition from national revolutionary terrorism to communism , has made an excellent in depth study of the transition in his book *In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme* He has summed up the analysis of these two documents in the following words The above two documents may be described as typical of the thinking of those revolutionaries who were then being attracted towards communism yet could not completely overcome the influence of romantic revolutionism Stating that there are both strong and weak points in the two documents he enumerates the strong points thus (a) A definite inclination towards communism and Bolshevik Russia as the first land of victorious socialism (b) Beginning of the understanding though not yet very clear of the international character of the national liberation revolution (c) An attempt to outline the social and economic order of Independent India (d) The realisation of the necessity of organising the labourers and peasants and the determination to undertake these tasks (e) Introduction of the principles of democratic centralism in the party"

1928 was a year of massive working class strikes in the main industrial centres of India It was also a year in which mass demonstrations expressing the boycott of the Simon Commission were held in the main cities of India Brutal lathi charge on such a protest demonstration in Lahore headed by Lala Lajpat Rai in which the great national leader received serious injuries

which led to his subsequent death a few months later roused nationwide anger throughout the country The newly reconsti tuted Party (HRA) retaliated by assassinating the police officer Saunders responsible for the same Bhagat Singh who with his group was probably responsible for this action later met Com munist leaders in Calcutta in December 1928 Sohan Singh Josh whom Bhagat Singh met records Bhagat Singh as saying We entirely agree with the programme and activities of your party but there are times when the blow of the enemy has to be imme diately counteracted by armed action to inspire confidence among the masses

Ajoy Ghosh who was a m mber of the party renamed HSRA (i e Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association) cor roborates this approach of theirs in his book *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades* He says Bhagat Singh and some others among us had already met a number of Communist leaders We felt sympathetic towards them and at one time even contemplated some sort of a working alliance with the Communists to organise the mass movement We of the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association to act as its armed section But when we learnt that Communists considered armed action by individuals to be harm ful to the movement we dropped the idea While we did not look upon Communists as revolutionists—revolution for us meant primarily armed action We felt one with them in many respects in their hatred for imperialism in their opposition to constitu tionalism and insistence on direct action in their striving for socialism (ibid p 18)

All these prove that the national revolutionary group of Bha gat Singh and his comrades was in close touch with similar groups in the Punjab and Bengal and they considered themselves part of the Hindusthan Republican Association founded by Sachin dra Nath Sanyal It can also be safely asserted that the groups of HRA were in touch with the Communist Party workers in the Punjab U P and Bengal Shaukat Usmani who was released from Jail after incarceration for 4 years after the Kanpur Bol shevik conspiracy case (1924) was in the middle of 1928 pre paring to leave India secretly for the USSR In one of his auto biographical writings published later (*Nabayogi Herald* Jaipur October 10 1974) he said that he contacted HRA groups in U P

which he says were desirous of establishing contact with the international Communist movement He also mentioned that HRA was now developing into HSRA Though no documentary proof is available as to when HRA changed to HSRA it appears that this must have taken place towards the end of 1928 or the beginning of 1929

The next most important document of the national revolutionary movement which indicated the further development towards the ideas of workers' and peasants resurgent movement and which was inspired by the ideas of scientific socialism is the joint statement of Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt It was made in the famous Assembly Bomb Case for throwing a bomb from the gallery of the Legislative Assembly on the hall below on April 8 1929 The *Indian Quarterly Register* Vol I, 1929 records that along with the bomb Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw red leaflets which was signed HSRA The text of the red leaflet is not available But the text of the statement which they made at the conclusion of their trial on June 6, 1929 was widely publicised in the nationalist press on June 8, 1929 Later on the text was published in the *Indian Quarterly Register* 1929 Vol I pp 78 80

In the beginning of this historic statement explaining why the bomb was thrown the authors said that their purpose was not to harm anybody in the Assembly but to expose the hollowness of the institution which the imperialists paraded as the 'so called Indian Parliament' The statement condemned the Assembly 'as a menacing monument of strangling power of the exploiters ' It makes a pointed reference to the Public Safety Bill which was rejected by a majority in the Assembly and later certified by the Viceroy to be made into a law This law curtailed the rights of British citizens to come to India to help building the trade union movement under the plea that they were Communists

The statement said that the bomb was thrown as a protest against the Trade Disputes Bill which sought to declare strikes in major industrial establishments as illegal and against the wholesale arrests of leaders of the labour movement' This was a reference to the countrywide arrest of militant trade union leaders and Communists which had taken place a few weeks before

on the 20th of March 1929 later known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case

Referring to the Irish Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution the statement went on to say that progressive ideas cannot be crushed by repression It eloquently asked Can ordinances and safety bills snuff out the flame of freedom in India? Conspiracy cases trumped up or discovered and incarceration of all young men who cherish the vision of a greater ideal cannot check the march of revolution After vividly describing the results of enslavement of the whole country and the exploitation of the workers peasants and the toiling masses by the imperialists and other exploiters the authors of the statement went on to define what they meant by revolution

> Radical change therefore is necessary and it is the duty of those who realise this to reorganise society on a socialistic basis Unless this is done and exploitation of man by man and of nations by nations which goes masquerading as imperialism is brought to an end the sufferings and carnage with which humanity is threatened today cannot be prevented and all talk of ending wars and ushering in an era of universal peace is undisguised hypocrisy By revolution we meant the ultimate establishment of an order of society which may not be threatened by such breakdown and in which the sovereignty of the proletariat should be recognised and as a result of which a world federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of capitalism and the misery of imperial wars The statement ended with the slogan Long live revolution!

It is necessary to state here that the slogan Long live revolution was raised in a massive demonstration of workers 30 000 strong which marched to the Congress pandal in December 1928 in Calcutta demanding from the national leaders that they stick to the nation s demand for complete independence and not go in for a compromise for Dominion Status In that demonstration as well as in a subsequent demonstration in connection with the boycott of the Simon Commission in Calcutta the slogan of Workers and Peasants Republic was raised

Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar s comment is significant He pointed out that at this point of time the young national revolutionaries while being attracted by the ideas and activities of the

Indian Communists, continued in their old line of activities He says On the minds of those who were being attracted towards communism, it had a dual effect It simultaneously strengthened the subjective attraction to communism as well as the spirit of romantic revolutionism', (*In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme*, p 184)

Against the background of the stormy events of 1929 when the Indian National Congress in its Lahore session at the end of December was to readopt the Independence Resolution, and launch a national struggle, came the Viceroy's announcement stating in vague terms that Britain's aim was to grant India Dominion Status Under the inspiration of Gandhiji a meeting between the national leaders and the Viceroy was scheduled to take place It was at this time that a bomb exploded under the special train carrying the Viceroy to Delhi (23rd December, 1929) without causing much damage or hurting him Subsequently Gandhiji launched a serious criticism in *Young India* making a pointed reference to this 'outrage", challenging them to put up their case which he offered to print in his journal In response to this the HSRA sent its manifesto, 'The Philosophy of the Bomb' which was printed in *Young India* later, in January 1930 These two manifestoes contain further development and maturing ideas of the national revolutionaries They are not now talking in vague terms of imperialism and capitalism, but are giving a concrete analysis of the Indian capitalist class vis a vis imperialism

After showing the futility of non violence and repudiating the charge of terrorism, the Manifesto goes on to say how the toiling masses of India are suffering under the oppression and exploitation of the imperialist rulers and sums up the situation thus 'Foreign domination and economic exploitation have unmanned the vast majority of the people, who constitute the workers and peasants of India The position of the Indian proletariat is today extremely critical It has a double danger to face It has to bear the onslaught of foreign capitalism on the one hand and the treacherous attack of Indian capital on the other The latter is showing a progressive tendency to join forces with the former The leaning of certain politicians in favour of Dominion Status shows clearly in which way the wind blows Indian capital is preparing to betray the masses into the hands of foreign capitalism and

receive as a price of this betrayal a little share in the government of the country The hope of the proletariat is, therefore, now centred in socialism which alone can lead to the establishment of a complete independence and the removal of all social distinctions and privileges (Manifesto to the Congress—1929)

The other Manifesto The Philosophy of the Bomb , which was printed in *Young India* proceeds on parallel lines and exposed the idea of non violence as soul force and asserts that without the addition of physical force it will not enable the revolutionaries and the Indian masses to attain their objective Explaining that subjective as well as objective factors play a role in the revolution the manifesto goes on to assert The revolutionaries believe that the deliverance of their country will come through revolution The revolution they are constantly working and hoping for, will not express itself in the form of an armed conflict between the foreign government and its supporters and the people it will usher a new social order The revolutionaries will ring the death knell of capitalism and class distinction and privileges It will bring joy and prosperity to the starving millions who are seething today under the terrible yoke of both foreign and Indian exploitation It will bring the nation into its own It will give birth to a new state a new social order Above all it will establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and will forever banish parasites from the seat of political power

Here it should be noted that the resolution condemning the bomb 'outrage on Viceroy's special brought before the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress in December 1929 with the full prestige and power of Mahatma Gandhi could only be passed with a trifling majority of 81 in a house of 1 713 Satyendra Narayan *Mazumdar who quotes this figure comments that the large num*ber of votes against the resolution was taken as an indication of the solid backing of the country behind the revolutionaries

The Chittagong Armoury Raid (as the official historians continue to call it) and its aftermath (1930 1934) took place against the background of the civil disobedience movement (1930 34) and the brutal imperialist repression against the national liberation movement including the repression against the Communists and the national revolutionaries The Chittagong uprising as it should be properly called represents at once the highest form of the development of the activities of the national revolutionaries and the begin

ning of their turning towards the ideas of the revolutionary working class The main organisers of this action were not a continuation of the HSRA but a new group formed by the younger elements of the Yugantar Party who were now working out a new form of action mainly inspired by the model of the Irish revolution Their idea was to organise an uprising on a limited scale of a district to be a model of a series of national uprisings Ananda Gupta a participant in the uprising describes this new idea of Surya Sen and his colleagues in the following words

> "The armoury and other centres of the British Government in Chittagong town have to be attacked in a lightning speed and occupied Establishment of the first Independent National Government, at least in Chittagong will open up a new stage in the independence movement" (Translated from *Masterda* by Ananda Gupta p 54)

Whether one agrees with the idea or not, it was definitely a higher stage in the development of the activities of the national revolutionaries It was a daring conception meticulously worked out and implemented with strict discipline It is on record that they could not succeed in liberating the town even for a short time But the heroic battle they fought against the overwhelming force of the British army on Jalalabad Hills will ever be enshrined as a memorable feat in the annals of our liberation struggle The Chittagong action was followed by a number of smaller actions by other revolutionary groups

Chittagong uprising and its aftermath which continued up to 1934 shocked the British rulers and they launched a brutal round of repression against the national revolutionaries and against the rising working class strike upsurge Now that their hands were free after the decline and final withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement on May 18, 1934 they not only launched cases like the Chittagong and Inter-Provincial Conspiracy Cases, but promulgated repressive measures for arrests without trial and in which thousands were put behind bars The following major repressive actions are on record

(1) January 8—Viceroy's statement in Calcutta "Crush the terrorist movement" Anti-Terrorist Bill introduced in the Punjab
(2) February 22—Military "anti-terrorist" marches in Midnapore

and Contai (3) March 13—Curfew in Chittagong (4) April 27—police open fire on Bombay textile strikers (5) April 28—strike leaders arrested (6) May 23—Again police firing on Bombay textile strikers (7) June 6—drive against terrorists in Bengal (8) July 23—Government order banning the CPI and its branches (10) Assembly passes Detenus Bill

In the thirties the Communist Party devoted special attention to the activities of the national revolutionaries which were making a big impact on the revolutionary youths of that period A dialogue between the two had already begun in a small way in 1928 and 1929 when youths belonging to both the persuasions were working in such youth organisations as the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha and Young Comrades League In 1931 on the occasion of the Martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and others of the Lahore Conspiracy Case the Communist accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case stopped the court proceedings and sent a telegram expressing their shock and horror at the execution of Bhagat Singh Rajguru and Sukhdev In 1932 when they made their general statement before the Meerut Court defending their policy and actions they included the following paragraphs devoted to the national revolutionaries (Terrorists)

> We are of course not insensible of the revolutionary virtues displayed by the terrorists nor of the advance which such parties as the Socialist Republic Army (means Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army—author) have achieved over orthodox nationalism They represent an advance in as much as they oppose non violence they give up consciously all mystical obscurantist philosophies in favour of a realistic progressive outlook they advocate at any rate in theory the mass revolutionary movement and they show the necessity of illegal organisation and the way in which it may be effected
>
> But we consider that the courage and self sacrifice of the terrorists are wasted and the advance they have made important though it is is not enough They have advanced from the position of the bourgeois nationalists but have reached only the limits of petty bourgeois nationalism In order really to serve the cause of independence and national revolution they have to go one step further to the mass revolutionary movement (from the General Statement of the Com

munist Accused in the Meerut Conspiracy Case 15 1 1932, pp 2924 2925)

This was the line on which the Communists continued their dialogue with the national revolutionaries miscalled terrorist inside the jails in Andamans, Hijli Deoli and other places between the years 1933 and 1937 The result of this dialogue continued in jail is assumed up by Satyendra Narayan Mazumdar thus 'A section of the revolutionaries began to be attracted to the ideas of scientific socialism and communism and people's revolution This was the beginning of the process of transition from national revolutionary terrorism to communism This process found its culmination in the second half of the 1930s in the formation of Communist consolidation in the cellular jail in the Andamans as well as in the detention camps in the mainland (*In Search of A Revolutionary Ideology and A Revolutionary Programme* p XII)

After describing the quests and searchings and doubts on many points the author says In the prison in the latter half of the thirties while the overwhelming majority turned finally towards communism some others accepted the Marxist ideology without accepting one of its principal and integral components namely, internationalism There were still others who remained firmly opposed to communism or even to diluted Marxism (ibid pp XII and XIII)

Indian Communists recognised their debt to the national revolutionaries to the most forward looking amongst them, when they stated in the preamble to the Party s constitution adopted at its Amritsar Party Congress in 1958

> The Communist Party of India arose in the course of our liberation struggle as a result of the efforts of the Indian revolutionaries who under the inspiration of the Great October Revolution were seeking new paths for achieving national independence It was forged in the fire of the big class battles of the working class which it led from its very inception (Preamble to the Constitution of the CPI p 1 para 2)

CHITTAGONG UPRISING AND ITS IMPACT

GANESH GHOSH

My mind is filled with indescribable joy to tell you about the Chittagong Uprising of 1930 about the martyr heroes that were connected with it and also about the impact the uprising had on our national life But at the same time I feel myself shaky and quite incompetent to appear before such an august and distinguished gathering as that of yours

I am very proud of the honour you have accorded to me though I do not deserve it at all I am sure the honour you have shown to me the homage you have paid to me are all to Masterda Surya Sen the top most leader of the Chittagong Uprising and also to those who had sacrificed everything on their own even their precious lives for the emancipation of our Motherland

The Chittagong Uprising is a landmark in the history of India s National Struggle for freedom It was neither a raid nor a terroristic action as it was represented through the mischievous propaganda of the British imperialists for the purpose of their own mean mischievous and selfish design to humiliate and denigrate the Chittagong Rebellion in the eyes of the people The series of revolutionary activities running for a number of years for overthrowing British domination even though short lived from the little hilly tracts of Chittagong were not only unique in these characteristics but also made an epochal impact on the struggle for India s liberation from foreign yoke The British Jingoes had characterised it from their own imperialistic outlook and viewpoint and had defined it as a raid and as a terroristic action though Sir Samuel Hoare a hardcore member of the British Conservative Party and the then Secretary of State for India could not but admit the importance of that Uprising by defining the same as Chittagong Rebellion in one of his statements in the House of Commons

However the characterisation of the Chittagong Uprising by the British Administrative agency in India as a mere 'raid' on

the armoury was not only wrong from our nationalist point of view but was far from truth even from the historical aspect

So long the British imperialists in India could imagine anything but the occupation of one of their strongest armouries and the establishment of an Independent Provisional Revolutionary Government through a sudden uprising by a very small group of revolutionaries most of whom were still in their teens, with limited resources of men money and arms So long all that they knew at best about the Indian revolutionaries was that they were a group of whimsical murderers and assassins that they committed dacoities and smuggled illegal arms and could even make bombs and explosives on a very limited scale but that they could organise such a daring assault on an armoury and other Strategically important Government establishments and dislocate the railway system and telegraphic communications burn down the Central Telephone building etc through a surprise attack by a band of militarily well organised and determined young revolutionaries under the leadership of a petty school teacher and his faithful lieutenants by successfully evading detection even by the most skilful and sensitive detective police was beyond their imagination Such an uprising was the first of its kind in India Apart from its all other aspects it had an important impact on the wider Indian National struggle aiming at emancipating India from British bondage

It was April 18 1930 The Day of final assault dawned at last It is a red letter day in the history of our revolutionary struggle The plan was chalked out with meticulous care and very secretly, hence the detective police gang got neither scent nor clue of the imminent uprising and of the impending assault on the different Government establishments The plan consisted of a programme for the setting up of a Provisional Independent Revolutionary Government with Masterda Surya Sen at its head by paralysing and destroying the universally hated foreign administrative system and emancipating Chittagong from the bondage of foreign subjugation The main object was not to attempt to free the whole of India nor even Bengal but to set an example before our countrymen particularly our youths and students and to demoralise the British imperialists This also had an important and great impact on our future national struggle

All arrangements were made with utmost secrecy, and so secretly that no party worker other than the top leaders knew anything whatsoever about it But the unusual activity of the leaders and their incessant advice to all the workers to prepare for sure and imminent death created an intense inquisitiveness amongst all, and to quench a little at least of their intense thirst to know of the plan the general plan was named 'A Programme of Death and nothing else This nomenclature helped the workers at least to think that an intense struggle was impending which would necessitate the sacrifice of their lives The main plan was as follows

(1) To occupy both the armouries of the imperialist rulers in *Chittagong in a lightning and surprising attack without giving any* scope or opportunity whatsoever to the main enemies to mobilise themselves

(2) To occupy and destroy thoroughly the Central Telephone office which was the centre of all internal communications of the town and the Central Telegraph building which maintained communications between Chittagong and the rest of the country

(3) To sever the telegraph wires adjacent to the railway lines and to dislocate the railway communication system between Chittagong and other districts so that exchange of information and easy transport of troops from other districts to Chittagong could not take place

(4) To make an all out effort either to take into custody of the Revolutionary Army as many English officers as possible so that they could be used as hostages or to totally wipe them out if they put up any sort of resistance whatsoever

Trained workers to carry out the different sections of the Plan were selected with great caution and with meticulous care Two groups with about 4 such persons in each were formed to dislocate the railway line and cut out the telegraph wires at two places one near the Dhum railway station about 80 miles from Chittagong and the other near the Feni railway station about 60 miles from Chittagong Four groups with an average of 6 persons in each were formed to attack and take over the Police Armoury, the Auxiliary Forces Armoury the Central Telegraph and Telephone

offices and the main European Club situated almost at the heart of the town

Thirty more such selected revolutionary workers were made up into six groups and were asked to come completely prepared and armed at a time about 15 minutes to 10 in the evening on the selected day and stay separately completely concealed within a large forest garden about 200 yards from the Police Armoury These boys were directed to go back home peacefully by about 10 30 p m if they did not hear some selected and secret slogans and saw some particular light signals by that time from some place nearby in which case of course they should at once rush to the place and report themselves there

The Police Armoury was situated just at the north western end of the town and was on a small hillock which was by the side of a main thoroughfare which runs out of the town towards the Bandar Bostani a muslim holy place within the hilly area More than 500 constables were always kept in readiness in this Central Police headquarters for any emergency anywhere within the district or outside This Police headquarters housed the Armoury also

Exactly at 10 in the evening of April 18 the assault group fixed for the Police Armoury arrived in a car at the bottom of the series of stairs which led to the top of the Armoury hillock The revolutionary Army officers helped by their accompanying aids and orderlies got down from the car and started to mount the stairs The perfectly Khaki uniform and the movement of the attacking group totally confused the sentry on duty who took them to be some high army officers and without challenging them saluted them with his arm down He was at once shot and he dropped down The other 5 sentries who were relaxing on the nearest verandah of the Armoury saw this got terribly panicky and ran away helter skelter for their lives Then a few blank shots in front of the residential building on the backside of the Armoury put to flight in no time all the 500 and more constables who lived there The entire Police Armoury thus came within the hold and complete control of the revolutionary troops

By that time selected slogans were shouted by 3 or 4 boys and big torches were used to show some particular light signals towards the big jungle area where about 5 dozen revolutionaries

were waiting in readiness And, as soon as they heard the slogans and saw the light signals they also shouted the slogans and rushed to the Police Armoury Then hammers and other necessary implements were brought up from the car below and the door of the Armoury was broken open More than 500 police rifles, several dozen revolvers and a large quantity of ammunition were brought out of the armoury and distributed to the assembled revolutionary troops

Similarly, another car with a group to take over the Auxiliary Force Armoury exactly at 10 O'clock the same evening entered the Armoury compound by the side of the main road from the town to Pahartali Here also the Pathan sentry on duty confused the attacking force to be some High Army Officers and saluted them when he was at once shot and killed The other 5 Pathan sentries on duty ran away for their lives but one more of them was shot and killed before he could clear out of the compound Serjeant-Major Farrel who was in charge of the Auxiliary Force Armoury lived in a house within a few yards from the Armoury building He was having his dinner at that time, he heard the shots at that unusual time came out and tried to rush to the door of the Armoury He refused to heed the warning and was at once shot and killed The Auxiliary Force Armoury also thus came under the complete control of the revolutionary troops The door of the Armoury was then opened by force and all the 303 Army rifles and a few Lewis guns and a number of revolvers were brought out But unfortunately even a good search of the whole Armoury building did not reveal the place where the ammunition was stored So only a few army rifles and all the revolvers were put into the car and all the rest including the automatic guns (Lewis and machine guns) were thoroughly broken down and the Magazine room was burnt down with petrol Then the group drove to the Police Armoury in accordance with the earlier instructions

The group to take over and destroy the Telephone Centre arrived at the place exactly 2 minutes before 10 p m in accordance with the earlier directive By displaying their revolvers they asked the employees in the room to go out at once which was readily obeyed The telephone key board was then thoroughly smashed by hammer blows and the whole place was burnt down with petrol After this the group drove to the Police Armoury

Both the groups in charge of tackling the railway started their work exactly at 10 O clock Their places of work were just adjacent to high hills and were completely desolate and without any *human habitation in the vicinity* So, at that hour of the night they felt no difficulty whatsoever to fulfil the task assigned to them So complete was their work that about half an hour later a loaded goods train from the Assam hills area to the Chittagong Port which was scheduled to cross that point at about 10 30 p m rolled down and fell on its side near the Dhum railway station

But the group to attack the European club came to the Police Armoury thoroughly disappointed and demoralised They went to the European club at the appointed hour thoroughly prepared either to take into custody the top officers of the district or to lay down their own lives but unfortunately they saw to their utter surprise the whole place in complete darkness One of them went inside and asked one of the employees of the club and learnt that the day being Good Friday no Christian came to the club for merriment.

The District Magistrate on receipt of some information from a constable who had rushed to him from the Police Headquarters, had unknowingly gone to the Auxiliary Force Armoury at about 10 30 p m to organise a counter offensive against the revolutionary attackers But he was at once detected at the Auxiliary Force Armoury then under the control of the rebel army and was shot at His driver got killed but he miraculously escaped He realised the situation to be very critical and at once arranged to send news to as many English residents of the town as was possible for him at that time for them to rush with their families to the Port to board a ship there for safety The Master of the ship under the directions of the District Magistrate sailed at once with the panicky passengers on board to the Bay of Bengal and sent appeals through the ship s wireless to the Calcutta Authorities to rush military help at once to Chittagong to save their lives

Meanwhile when all the attacking groups excepting of course the Dhum and the Feni groups had assembled at the Police Armoury Masterda Surya Sen arrived there, took the salute of the Revolutionary Force named earlier in the Plan as the 'Chittagong Brigade of The Indian Republican Army', hoisted the National Flag of Independence and declared the formation of an

Independent Provisional Revolutionary Government under him in free and independent Chittagong and appealed to all the inhabitants of the country to come forward and render all help to the Free Independent Government of Chittagong so that it could survive and pull through the imminent attack by the British freebooters from outside the district Three or four hand bills containing this appeal and similar other directives had already been very secretly printed earlier and very securely kept preserved After Masterda Surya Sen's declaration at the Police Armoury arrangements were at once made for very wide distribution of those handbills throughout the whole district

Meanwhile a few army officers managed to secure the lone machine gun kept in the Port area for emergency use and brought the same with them to the top of the Municipal water tank not far *from the Police Armoury and suddenly started firing on the Police* Armoury A terrible counter volley fire from the Police Armoury at once silenced the machine gun The army officers then rapidly got down with the machine gun and fled away for fear of being surrounded and caught by the rebel troops whose number they could not realise The machine gun fire however did not cause any injury to any of the rebel troops

The leadership of the rebel troops then decided to leave the police Armoury and go to a safer place before dawn Orders were issued to each person to carry with him as many guns revolvers and ammunition as he could carry and destroy all the rest After this was done petrol was poured on the Armoury building and it was set on fire but unfortunately Himangshu Sen (Andu) got himself severely burnt in the process and was really in a very *serious state Four revolutionaries carried him home and left him* at his mother's house Unfortunately because of certain circumstances these four could not reunite with the main force again in spite of their best efforts

The rebel force then under the direction of Masterda Surya Sen left the town and went over to the hilly area just on the outskirts of the town There they waited in all readiness to encounter the enemy troops several thousands of which ultimately came 4 days after the uprising that is on the April 22 late in the afternoon when the entire rebel force was on the top of a small hill known as Jalalabad Hill The enemy troops surrounded the

Jalalabad Hill from all sides and tried to get to the top, but a sudden and terrible counter attack from the top foiled all their attempts They tried twice but each time they were beaten back with severe casualties on their side while not one of the rebel troops being on the hill top got a minor injury Ultimately the enemy left the Jalalabad area and went over to two higher hills a little distant from Jalalabad and started machine gun fire on the Jalalabad hill which in a short spell killed 12 of the revolution aries By that time the sun went down and the enemy troops left 83 of their fellow soldiers dead around the Jalalabad Hill and rapidly fled to the town for fear of being surrounded and killed during the night

To honour and pay our respect to the young martyrs of Jalala bad and to acknowledge our gratitude to them their names need to be mentioned here They were Hari Gopal Bal (Tegra) Nir mal Lala Tripura Sen Bidhu Bhusan Bhattacherjee Prabhash Bal Sasanka Datta Madhu Sudan Datta Naresh Roy Pulin Ghosh Mati Kanungo Jitendra Das Gupta and Ardhendu Dasti dar

After dark Masterda Surya Sen decided after very serious thin king that with inferior arms it would be very unwise, perhaps posi tively disastrous for the rebel force to go in for direct confronta tion with the enemy equipped with highly superior arms It would be better to take guerilla warfare particularly when the struggle was to be a prolonged one Accordingly that same night Masterda with his whole rebel force secretly left Jalalabad and went to a few dependable and trusted villages not very far from the town and started to live there in hiding with a number of highly sympathetic families The number of such villages did not go beyond a couple of dozens and the rebel troops including Masterda himself lived in them continuously almost for the next three years The rebel troops during all those three years had very often gone out of these shelters in disguise and in very small groups to different centres of the town and at times also to other district centres to attack either enemy pickets or hated administra tive officers Excepting on one or two occasions these groups suc cessfully managed to come ba k to the shelters again after fulfil ling their missions The Police and the Government knew of those villages and very often they surrounded one or two of them at a time with several thousand troops and armed police and

thoroughly searched each Hindu house in these beseiged villages But till 1933 they could hardly arrest any prominent wanted person

The situation in the whole district of Chittagong and particularly in the general attitude of the people towards the revolutionaries of the district both of the Hindus and to a certain extent of the Muslims too, had undergone some definite change The truth of this statement is borne out by the fact that apart from the Hindu ladies even Muslim mothers in villages besieged by the Police, at great risk to themselves and to their families often gave very secure shelter to Masterda and other rebel troops living there in hiding The way in which the rebel fighters of Chittagong had laid down their lives for the freedom of the country and their unusual valour and heroism had to a great extent influenced the people and helped them to change their earlier attitude towards the revolutionary workers

At midnight on April 22, the day there was fight on the Jalalabad Hill, four persons suspected to be armed rebels of Chittagong were arrested from a Calcutta-bound train at the Feni Railway Station about 60 miles from Chittagong But the suspected persons suddenly made a violent counter-attack on the large number of armed police surrounding them at the railway station broke out of the encirclement and vanished in the darkness But unfortunately all of them got separated from one another in the process though happily reunited again a few days later at Calcutta A few glorious and heroic incidents connected with the Chittagong Uprising may now be mentioned here briefly

Amarendra Nandy a very intelligent and courageous young boy of about 17 years, was sent from the hilly area on April 20 by Masterda to go secretly to the town and come back as early as possible with full information about the condition of the town, about the feelings of the people and also the whereabouts of the four Comrades with whom the main body had lost contact. Amarendra was a very popular and wellknown young man particularly in the vast Sadarghat area where he used to live He however very cleverly managed to come to the town and safely remained in hiding for several hours but by early morning next day on April 24, he was unfortunately detected by a police spy who at once informed the local police station Practically in no

time the whole Sadarghat area got surrounded Finding no way of escape Amarendra got under a small culvert completely covered with moss and shrubs and was not easily perceptible from outside Unfortunately he was detected there and got thoroughly encircled Finding no way out valiant Amarendra preferred to commit suicide with his own revolver than to surrender to the hated foreign bandits

Six young rebels, all students of the First Year class of the College were living in hiding after the battle of Jalalabad in one of the villages mentioned earlier As time went by they felt increasingly impatient They sent letters almost every alternate day to Masterda begging him to give them some serious work which could provide them with a chance to settle accounts with the hated enemy for their recently lost comrades Every time Masterda advised them to wait a little more till a good programme could be chalked out but this could not pacify them and after some thorough discussion for a few days among themselves, these six heroic impatient rebels ultimately decided to go secretly to the town and desperately attack the European locality adjacent to the dock workshop in the Sadarghat area Considering their condition of mind Masterda ultimately felt compelled to give them permission and they accordingly came to the town fully prepared and armed on the evening of the 5th of May 1930

But by that time the condition of the whole town had got completely changed The town had practically been taken over by the military and small army pickets had been set up at every corner and at every junction of almost every street Unfortunately they got detected in no time and tried to go back to the village again but they were hotly pursued by the Police all through the evening They secured an abandoned boat in the river Karnaphuli and managed to go to a distance of about 8 to 10 miles from the town, but got surrounded by the hostile inhabitants and armed police at a place known as Kalarpole Two of them got arrested but the remaining four rebel young men took advantage of the darkness and hid themselves within a dense hemp field a few yards away from the village road A big group of troops and armed police frantically searched for them in vain all through the night with big search lights, but they were found out next morning that is on May 6 at about 8 O'clock when the sun was

up They were at once surrounded and asked to throw away their arms and come out which they boldly refused to do Consequently there were mutual firings from both sides for some time between short intervals Ultimately all the four youngmen consisting of Rajat Sen, Manoranjan Sen, Swadesh Roy and Debaprasad Gupta laid down their lives fighting to the last for the freedom of our country

A few Chittagong rebels had managed to come over to Calcutta and took shelter in a house at Chandannagar about 20 miles from Calcutta then a French colony On the night of September 2 the English Commissioner of the Calcutta Police, violating the local French laws and thoroughly disregarding all international norm entered Chandannagar with a vast armed force without informing even the local authorities and surrounded the house in which the Chittagong rebels were then living There was a short and swift armed skirmish between the four rebels and the British Police in which the young rebel hero Makhan Ghosal got killed and the other three together with the heroic lady Suhashini Ganguly and the patriotic gentleman Sasadhar Acharya who had so long publicly posed as husband and wife and had given the rebels shelter in their house were mercilessly beaten up by the brutal and cowardly Commissioner of Calcutta Police and arrested

Towards the end of November 1930 Craig the then Police Chief of Bengal had gone to Chittagong to make police arrangements of the district far more strict so that a more thorough and elaborate repression could be let loose on the people of Chittagong After fulfilling his mission he left Chittagong on the November 30 and boarded the train for Calcutta He was pursued by two rebel youths who wanted to meet him the next morning at the Chandpur Railway station where he was to leave the train and board a steamer The train arrived at Chandpur early on December 1 It was an intensely foggy morning and nothing could be seen even a few feet away They shot and killed a person who looked almost like Craig and who had come down first from the compartment in which Craig was travelling He was an important officer accompanying Craig and he had been sent down first to face any untoward eventuality that might happen Both the youngmen got caught, there was a mockery of a trial and Ram

Krishna Biswas, a first year science student of the Chittagong College was sentenced to death and was hanged in May, 1931

The First Armoury Raid trial began in Chittagong by the second week of September 1930 and by the middle of the next year it was going on in full swing In all 32 persons, both leaders and revolutionary workers were undergoing trial and were kept in the Chittagong Jail By February 1931 it was jointly decided both by the leaders within the Jail and Masterda outside in hiding, to try to blow up the Jail walls to secure liberation of the undertrial rebels and at the same time to bring about a deadlock in the administration by causing unusual explosions at different centres of the town In accordance with this plan huge quantities of very powerful explosives were very secretly prepared at a number of places in the town and about half a maund of this deadly powder and a number of small arms were very successfully smuggled into the jail and kept secretly and securely buried at a number of places

In addition, one dozen very powerful land mines not of unusual size were also prepared with long wire connections to cause explosion at desirable moments at different important and strategic centres of the town to bring about a deadlock in the administration The whole town was then under continual curfew between dusk and dawn and police cars prowled throughout the night over almost every street of the town Yet a few unusually bold courageous, and intelligent resourceful young revolutionary workers took the risk and successfully kept buried about half a dozen of these landmines at different important centres and road crossings One was buried under the main staircase of the District Court building one was buried at the main gate of the bungalow of the Police Chief, one was buried at the main gate of the Circuit House in which the three Tribunal Judges lived and one at the junction of the Love Lock Lane and the main street just below the hill in which the District Magistrate lived and so on But unfortunately owing to certain unforeseen circumstances and also as a result of minor inadvertance on the part of some devoted workers the whole plan went awry in May 1931

On August 31, 1931 a universally hated monstrous and inhuman Police officer who publicly boasted that any person who could cause him any injury whatsoever was yet to be born was

shot and killed His depredations particularly against young ladies and girls of both the town and villages had gone on beyond limits and Masterda had received a large number of appeals from different persons to take some steps against the monster He was killed on August 31 afternoon in broad day light on a football field before a dense crowd of about a lakh of people Haripada Bhattacharjee a young boy of about 13 years was caught and given a sentence of life imprisonment

The death of this unusually loyal and devoted Police officer so much affected the top English officers of the district that they themselves came out openly next morning and disregarding all Government rules, social customs, formalities, and decencies, publicly urged Muslim youngmen to begin a communal riot against the Hindus in retaliation When this mischievous appeal failed those high district officers including the District Magistrate and Police Chief themselves rushed in uncontrollable rage and revenge to the nearby office of the *Panchajanya* a nationalist Bengali Daily and broke down with hammer blows the Press and the machine After taking evidence from Hindus and Muslims alike and collecting pictures of police atrocities, Deshapriya J M Sengupta exhibited and narrated the events to the people of England

The First Armoury Raid Case concluded by the end of January 1932 and judgement was delivered on March 1, 1932 Out of 32 persons on trial 12 were given transportation for life, two three years imprisonment and the rest acquitted but detained without trial till 1938

By June 1932 Masterda and Nirmal Sen another topmost leaders of the Chittagong rebels were living in a house in a village called Dhalghat Pritilata Waddedar, a revolutionary girl and Headmistress of a Girls School had gone to the house from the town on being called by Masterda Suddenly on the 13th evening a large number of troops surrounded the house and tried to get into the same There was a short and sharp skirmish in which the officer in charge of the army got killed and Nirmal Sen and another heroic rebel youth Apurba Sen courted martyrdom while Masterda and Pritilata Waddedar successfully broke out of the encirclement and went away to a safer shelter

The European residents of Chittagong had come to know dur-

ing the Armoury Raid trial of the attempt by the rebels to destroy the main European Club Panic and fear made them change their rendezvous to the Pahartali European Club which was outside the town and in their consideration a safer place Almost all European Administrative Officers, Port Officers, Railway Officers businessmen and Army Officers, almost all Europeans, frequented the Pahartali club almost every evening for merrymaking At times administrative officers seriously discussed with the army officers in the Club what more and new form of repression could be unleashed on the people of the district to teach them a lesson and as a result of such discussion, groups of armymen and armed police often went to different villages without any specific reason or provocation whatsoever but just to mercilessly beat up every man and woman of the village and burn down houses of political suspects Some of the employees of the club including some boys and bearers were very closely connected with the revolutionary party and often sent news to Masterda beforehand about such proposed police offensives whenever they could overhear such talks Ultimately they began to demand incessantly some very strong action against the club to destroy the hated centre of enemy conspiracies Masterda ultimately approved of the suggestion and formed a small group of eight choicest youngmen with extraordinary courage and boldness under Kumari Pritilata to attack the club and try to destroy it

On September 24 1932 eight heroic young rebels led by Pritilata dramatically entered the Pahartali European Club at about 9 o'clock in the evening The sentries were relaxing themselves at different places with cards and other amusements The young rebels surrounded the Club House quietly took positions before each door and some of the windows and suddenly at a notice from their leader made a terrible attack on those who were inside with bombs and guns In about 3 to 4 minutes there were huge casualties inside The sentries and troops who were on duty got terribly panicky with the sudden and unusual sound of the bombs and guns and ran away as fast as their legs could carry them to distant places outside the Club and there was then none inside the Club who could offer the rebels any resistance Then on a signal from Pritilata the rebels assembled at a point and quickly marched out of the Club Pritilata was behind them all and

when all had gone some considerable distance out of the Club gate, Pritilata swallowed a dose of Potassium Cyanide, which was with her, fell down and expired in no time About half an hour later the Police and the troops came back and after a thorough search of the place with big lights found the body of Pritilata with a statement under her signature within her clothes The statement was a clarion call to the women of India to come forward and take their legitimate place and share with their brothers in the armed struggle against the British bandits for freedom of the motherland

The greatest disaster to the Chittagong Revolutionary Party took place early next year on February 16, 1932 when the top most leader of the whole uprising Masterda Surya Sen was himself arrested in a house in village Goirala Masterda had gone there to see a number of rebel workers and draw up the next plan of work On information from a greedy petty landlord who lived next door to Masterda's shelter, a good number of soldiers suddenly surrounded the house at about 9 o'clock in the evening All the rebel youth except one who were there in the house including Kumari Kalpana Datta, a heroic rebel girl sensing the presence of the troops quietly entered the thick jungle around the house and went away in different directions The sentries could not know anything of those fleeing youths It was all very dark around the house and within the surrounding thick jungle it was impossible to see anything even about a couple of feet away Unfortunately Masterda suddenly dashed against a Gorkha Sentry standing there within the jungle who at once caught hold of him very tightly and shouted for help Within the tight grip of the Gorkha Sentry Masterda felt it impossible to use his gun, nor could he shout for help At once a very powerful light was thrown on the spot and the whole place became as bright as under the sun Another young rebel was arrested with Masterda and both of them were soon taken away to a strong sentry post A few days later the whole house was razed to the ground by the Police The owner of the house Smt Kshiroda Prova, who was the Universal Aunt of the whole revolutionary party was given a heavy jail sentence She is still alive at 94 and is living in Calcutta

About 3 months later, on May 18, 1932 a house in Gohira, a

village adjacent to the sea coast was suddenly surrounded by a large number of troops Tarakeswar Dastidar a fourth year science student of the local college and a very close favourite of Masterda who had taken up the leadership of the revolutionary party of Chittagong after Masterda was then living in the house Manoranjan Das a young rebel and Kumari Kalpana Datta also were with him in that house The soldiers shouted asking everyone inside the house to come out at once and surrender but when no reply to this order was seen or heard indiscriminate firing were started by the troops into the house which killed Manoranjan Das At once fire was opened from inside the house also but suddenly when Purna Talukdar a grand old man and the owner of the house got killed by a police bullet Tarakeswar Dastidar and Kalpana Datta in order to avoid further casualties of innocent men came out with their hands up and surrendered to the army They were at once taken away to a police camp

Towards the end of June 1933 Rohini Barua a rebel boy of Chittagong of about 15 years was arrested and put in jail About 15 months later he was transferred to the Faridpur district and kept interned in a village called Daulatpur The officer in charge of that police station was an unusually loyal servant and sychophant of the English rulers and was equally hostile and cruel to the nationalists When he found Rohini Barua a young boy within his control he used to incessantly insult and humiliate him for no reason whatsoever and this became a source of pleasure and amusement to him At last this crossed the limits of Rohini s tolerance and on December 15 1935 under serious provocation the boy killed the officer and faced the gallows with a smile on his face

After Masterda s arrest in February 1933 the revolutionary movement in Chittagong slowed down to a considerable extent and ultimately in a couple of years time it got almost completely stopped Only one or two very bold incidents which occurred before Masterda s death may be mentioned here in brief The Third Armoury Raid Trial with Masterda Surya Sen Tarakeswar Dastidar and Kalpana Datta commenced on June 15 1933 and judgement was delivered on August 14 1933 in which Masterda Surya Sen and Tarakeswar Dastidar were sentenced to be hanged and Kalpana Datta was given a life sentence Masterda and

Tarakeswar were put to death in the Chittagong jail on January 12, 1934 It has been definitely established that both of them were mercilessly beaten by the top executive officers of Chittagong which ended their lives and their dead bodies were then put on the gallows and hung down by the hanging rope Their bodies were neither handed over to their relatives nor were they cremated within the Chittagong Jail Both the bodies were taken away by a British War Cruiser 'The Renown" and thrown into the Bay of Bengal, a few hundred miles away from the Indian coast The Cruiser was detained in the Chittagong port for about a week for this particular work

On January 7, 1934, five days before Masterda's death four death defying and unusually bold young rebels Krishna Chowdhury, Nitya Ranjan Sen, Himangshu Chakraborty and Haren Bhattacharya fully equipped with bombs and revolvers cleverly managed to get inside the cricket ground on the Paltan Maidan where a competitive cricket match of European players was going on and where a few hundred English spectators had assembled to see the game The whole cricket ground was then put under very strict control and watch of the police and the military and none other than a European or one in immaculate European clothes was allowed to go in The boys cleverly avoided the watch and going near the spectator's gallery suddenly made a virulent attack on them with bombs and revolvers There were a good number of casualties amongst the spectators but in a few seconds sentry troops rushed to the spot and shot down Himangshu Chakraborty and Nitya Ranjan Sen Krishna Chowdhury and Haren Bhattacharya were arrested, given a mock trial and killed on the gallows on June 5, 1934

On the evening of January 9, 1934, three days before Masterda's death the greedy petty landlord who had helped the police to arrest Masterda got his head completely severed from his trunk None could either be arrested or even suspected for the murder of the dirty and hated traitor

This concludes the description of the incidents connected with the Chittagong Uprising An attempt may be made now to make a brief assessment of the impact of the same on our national scene

Of course the Chittagong Uprising of 1930 could neither

liberate India nor even the province of Bengal But that had never been intended Towards the end of the third decade of this century the Chittagong revolutionaries found the situation within the country fairly mature for a hard and desperate struggle against the British bandits to throw them out of India and on the basis of this assessment of the national situation they wanted to set an example before our countrymen and specially before the youth of our country by liberating in fact and in reality the little district of Chittagong The revolutionary leaders had hopes that if attempts were then made by our people and particularly by the youth of our country at different places to liberate their own areas their attempts might be successful at some places at least and that would at the same time certainly cause terrible demoralisation to the haughty and boastful brutes ruling over our country

This plan of the Chittagong leaders could not be realised owing to the unusual precaution the rulers had taken throughout India after their Chittagong experience but it cannot be denied that the Chittagong Uprising and the way a few dozen patriotic youngmen of Chittagong laid down their lives provided great inspiration to our countrymen to prepare for the final struggle for national liberation By the beginning of the fourth decade the situation in practically the whole of Bengal had become a barrel of high explosives and the Chittagong Uprising acted as a fiery spark to the same Almost immediately after the Chittagong Uprising practically the whole of Bengal burst out in a terrible explosion which the British marauders even with their unlimited power strength resources and brute force could not in any way check or control Let us take the case of one district only that of Midnapur The revolutionary patriots of Bengal had then resolved not to allow any inhuman anti Indian English official to head the administration of the district and three anti Indian Britishers were put to eternal silence in the district one after the other The rulers in retaliation shot and hanged a number of patriotic youngmen but could not save their Magistrate at the top of the district administration of Midnapur I need not dilate upon this point any further

The Chittagong Uprising almost coincided with or was immediately followed by nationalist outbursts in other parts of India

A few days after the Chittagong rising a Company of patriotic Garhwali troops stationed at Peshawar at that time refused to carry out a monstrous order of their superior English officer to indiscriminately shoot down unarmed and non violent Congress volunteers of the town and were threatened with court martial Under the direction of Chandra Singh Garhwali their patriotic and heroic leader they went over with all their arms and fraternised with the Pathan volunteers At this unusual turn of events all the English and Anglo Indian residents and army officers of the town at once fled to far off places with their families for fear of their lives There was no trace of British control in Peshawar for about 12 days and the whole town was under the control of the Congress volunteers After 12 days an unusually large number of British tommies one night stealthily entered Peshawar and took possession of the town again The patriotic Garhwali troops were then given unusually brutal sentences to satisfy the rulers sense of retaliation Yet these patriotic and heroic Garhwali soldiers have through their love for the country and through their sufferings for keeping the national prestige high carved out for themselves an indelible position in the hearts of the people of India

One more such example may be cited here About a fortnight after the Chittagong Uprising the people of Sholapur an industrial town in South Maharashtra under the guidance and leadership of the highly organised textile workers of that town inflamed by the news of Gandhiji's arrest came out openly and burnt down all the Police outposts and Government offices of the town on May 5 1930 All the Police army units English officers and English residents of the town at once fled with their families to places far away There was no trace whatsoever of any sort of British domination or control anywhere in the town for about a week and during this time a temporary Government almost exactly like the one formed earlier by the rebel troops in Chittagong was formed in Sholapur by the textile workers to maintain peace and carry on essential services of the people Later on praise in profusion were bestowed on this Provisional Government for the very good services they had rendered during that very short period and also for their proposed plan for the future

About a week later a huge force of British soldiers one night

entered the town quitely as they had done earlier in Peshawar and occupied the town again The people of the town were then subjected to inhuman repression and brutalities by the British troops

That the Chittagong Uprising had supplied some fresh inspiration to our national movement for emancipation had been admitted even by the hostile anti-Indian rulers of England Sir Samuel Hoare the then Secretary of State for India in reply to a question by a Labour member had stated in the British House of Commons that "The Chittagong rebellion of 1930 had provided a flood of inspiration to the freedom movement in India"

The domination of the British oppressers did not last even for 20 years after the Chittagong Uprising of 1930 and the little that the Chittagong Rebellion had contributed to our ever-growing freedom struggle has become a glorious chapter in the history of our liberation movement

We remember today with great pride and honour all those unforgettable patriotic heroes of India who had laid down their lives during the long 190 years between 1757 and 1946 to drive the British bandits out of India

Today we bow down our heads in all humility to pay our grateful homage and acknowledge our indebtedness to them all

May they all live for ever in our hearts!

CAPTURING ARMOURIES

ANANTA SINGH

World history is replete with memorable heroic battles fought and instances of individuals' impeccable courage But the saga that was created on April 18 1930 at Chittagong has no parallel Sixtyfour death defying young rebels on that day challenged the most powerful empire on earth and caused its collapse in one part of the Indian sub continent With a dozen of revolvers and as many breach-loader guns they made the sun set in one corner of the vast British empire

I had the honour to be one of the main architects of the Chittagong Uprising Masterda[1] planned the armed uprising to dislodge British rule at least from one of its strongholds to set an example for the revolutionary youngmen, to shake off the country from its stupor April 18 was that fateful day The strategy chalked out meticulously comprised broadly of the following

1 To attack and to capture the armoury magazine, guard's room and the barracks of the police line

2 To attack and to seize the armoury magazine, and the guard's room of the British Auxiliary force

3 To attack and to destroy the Telephone Office Also to cut the telephone wires in the town on various spots in case the Telephone office cannot be destroyed

4 To attack and to destroy the Telegraph office Also to cut the telegraph wires as an alternative measures in case the telegraph office cannot be destroyed

5 To make an all-round attack and to massacre the hated Europeans in the Club

6 To capture the two gun shops on the second round of attack

7 To remove the railway lines near Dhum to derail the train, to stop communications from outside
8 To remove the lines near Feni Station for the same purpose, to cut off Chittagong from the rest of the Bengal province
9 To capture the requisite number of motor cars and to retain them for the final attack
10 To distribute leaflets of two varieties by ten trained small squads at the defined hour after two hours of the actual rising
11 To complete the complicated task of finally joining the two main forces after the seizure of the two headquarters one of the Auxiliary Force and the other of the Police Line

On 18 April I got up exactly at 5 30 a m and greeted the morning sun gazing intently at the distant horizon I could hear my heart throbbing violently With the beats of my heart there came a voice from within and spontaneously I murmured to myself, 'You Britishers! Hark! Roars there the death knell of destruction"

Within half an hour I was ready to go out I took my pistol from the drawer I could hear myself muttering Today, today and not tomorrow ' I went to my garage I turned up my Baby Austin the Emden of the Indian Republican Army of the Chittagong branch I drove through hillocks and turned at the foot of the hill on which the bungalow of the Divisional Commissioner was situated Then I passed through lanes and bylanes and stopped before a thatched house to meet our supreme commander Masterda

When I got out of the car I was filled with a strange sensation Most probably such psychological reaction was inevitable for us that day specially when we were determined to make the final showdown with the British Army and the police that night

I found Masterda absolutely calm His sobriety and his serenity were reflected on his calm face He was as deep as a fathomless sea, as peaceful as the Pacific ocean and as high as the highest peak of the Himalayas

Masterda with that bewitching smile asked me whether I was sure of the success of the rising Without any hesitation whatsoever I said that we would take the town by storm I assured him that our younger brothers were determined, trained and plucky

Masterda's eyes became brighter He held my hand and asked whether there was any chance of leakage any danger of inner treachery I told him that I was quite convinced that the Intelligence Branch had been outmanoeuvred and Chittagong Police was lulled into sleep

From Masterda's place I drove straight to Ganesh and thoroughly scrutinised the mobilisation chart and the strategic plan The chart was of the size of a wall map in which mobilisation and disposition of forces and arms and explosives were represented with codes We then destroyed both mobilisation chart and the strategic plan

But that time General Lokenath Baul appeared and reported his part of the assigned duty He was confident that nothing would go wrong with his front

I bade goodbye to them and drove to Nizam Paltan and reached an isolated cottage to meet Nirmalda I told him jokingly not to get late this time With all his simplicity he said that he would not fail and be at his post in time

I met Ambikada in the house of Ganesh at 8 45 a m I left my Baby Austin in the charge of Ganesh and with Ambikada went to take delivery of the new Chevrolet car from the showroom of M/s J N Ray Chowdhury & Co I drove the new car with Ambikada towards Pahartali Railway Station along a lonely road

Ambikada I broke the silence the first martyr *Kanailal* who murdered the traitor in the British prison and defied the gallows was the harbinger of the revolutionary fire in India against the British rule And today a handful of Chittagong youth merely with a dozen of revolvers and a dozen of breach loader guns will seize the town by storm which was till now unthinkable in the history of India

Ambikada flared up in his revolutionary zeal and said This will be the clarion call to the revolutionary youths of India The British must know that they have no impregnable fortress in India worth the name before a well organised determined attack of the revolutionaries even if they be ill armed and a handful in number

I drove back to the heart of the town and dropped Ambikada near the Congress office Then I met Naresh to find out whether all the arms had been checked or not Naresh said that every

thing was all right He was to lead the best team with fire arms, grenades and other deadly weapons like swords battle axes and spears to carry out the task of exemplary massacre in the European Club to retaliate the unlimited crimes and cruelty on our women folk and children committed by the British officers

Next I met Tripura[9] who informed me that all the watches had been regulated checked and disbursed to the respective group commanders Now nothing else was to be done I returned home and waited for the zero hour

The Chittagong Police Armoury was situated on a hillock at the North Western fringe of the town It used to be manned by 500 armed sepoys residing in the two adjoining barracks

The assault on the armoury and other important places was scheduled for 10 00 p m Ganesh Ghosh s house at Sadarghat was the headquarters of the revolutionaries We six—Deva Prasad Gupta[9] Himangshu Sen,[10] Haripada Mahajan[11] Saroj Guha[12] Ganesh Ghosh and myself assembled at Ganesh Ghosh s house for the purpose We boarded the car just 15 minutes before 10 00 p m Each of us had put on military uniforms according to his rank and carried a revolver or a pistol As I was selected to drive the car I took the driver s seat

We reached the Chittagong Water Works near the Armoury, at the appointed time, by the minute hand of the watch The head light of the car spotted Masterda at the appointed place, near the bend on the road He stood there majestically attired in pure white dress with a stiffly ironed Gandhian Cap on his head adorned with a shining metallic button embossed with Mother India's symbol He was wearing a white dhoti and a white khaddar long coat fastened by metallic buttons and pure white kid shoes

Metallic insignia of the President of the Indian Republican Army Chittagong branch was affixed on the left breast of his long coat Standing by his side was his bodyguard—Benod Dutta[9] The grand appearance of Masterda evoked in us enthusiasm inspiration and confidence about our success

I took the car near Masterda—all six of us got down stood at attention and saluted Masterda at the command of Ganesh Ghosh Masterda received the salute and enquired—'everything all right?' and had a short but important dialogue—after which we

boarded the car again and checked our arms for the last time The guard room of the armoury was not even a minute's drive from the place I started the engine just one minute before 10 p m When the wheels started rolling, a sharp command came—'cut off the safety' —we pushed the safety button of our arms—these were now ready to fly bullets at the pull of the triggers

Proceeding 50 to 60 yards we could clearly see the sentry mounting guard with his rifle on his shoulder in 'Slope Arm' position, fitted with its bayonet The scabbard of the bayonet was hanging from his waist belt and a cartridge belt lay across his chest The remaining guards were resting in the nearby guard room The sentry too had noticed our approaching car and kept staring at us At the sight of the sentry—our hands tightened on our arms—forefingers ready on the triggers The sentry and the guard room stood on a mound at a height of about twelve feet—reached by a flight of stairs We could reach him by climbing the stairs and it would naturally take sometime We became tense kept close watch on the sentry all through I brought the car at the base of the stairs—all six climbed out of the car smartly and started climbing the steps hurriedly with Ganesh and myself on the lead Our hand holding arm was kept at our back, so that it did not become visible to the sentry It did not take us more than 5 to 6 seconds to reach the top stair within a distance of 4 to 5 feet from the sentry Both Ganesh and myself simultaneously opened fire on the sentry piercing his chest with bullets and he fell down trembling like an uprooted tree

While opening fire we shouted out— Get out '—'fly away'—"save your lives 'Gandhiji's Raj has been established" and immediately rushed at the other guards in the guard room We continued the shouts and the fire so that they could not lay hand on their arms In this attack each of us fired not more than 5/6 shots Two other sentries were injured in the skirmish and the others fled None could lay hands on their arms—though these were lying by their side

A detailed planning with meticulous care had been decided upon earlier controlling and coordinating the movements and activities of each member and of all the groups

Our plan was to shout out particular slogans with the success of our initial surprise attack so that seven small groups of our

members lying in concealment in the surrounding places to the armoury—could come rushing to the armoury shouting similar slogans and join us We shouted out— Inquilab Zindabad Long live revolution Down with Imperialism Members of the seven groups immediately responded and came running shouting the slogans

The surprise attack—firing from the revolvers and pistols shouts of threats slogans by the rushing revolutionaries and ourselves—created such a panic among the remaining sepoys and guards living in the two barracks that they immediately took to their heels and fled helter skelter

It took us only seven seconds to mount the assault and capture the guard room and within two minutes the entire police line barracks and quarters were vacated—giving up complete vacant possession of the Police Armoury Soon Masterda and members of the seven groups came and joined us Our next task was to equip them with arms and ammunition by breaking open the doors of the Police magazine

We carried with us big sized torch lights sledge hammers and other accessories We immediately posted our own guards—keeping watch on the entry passages to the armoury and to the adjoining fields with the torch lights armed with rifles seized from the guard room

Padlocks of the magazine rooms were broken with heavy hammers Rows of revolvers pistols musketry came into our possession satisfying our long craving

Ganesh Ghosh commanded the revolutionary army to fall in and they stood in two rows in front of the armoury Six of the members were ordered to carry the arms and supply each member with one musketry and one revolver Four others were deployed to supply the ammunition

Thereafter Ganesh Ghosh gave practical demonstration and instructions about the use of the musketry—how to load fire and unload He ordered the army to load and fire at his command aiming towards the sky Fifty musketry roared out simultaneously—thrice at his command—Load Fire

Masterda ordered to set fire to the Union Jack the symbol of the foreign rule This was immediately carried out by setting fire to the British flag bringing the same from the guard room

The National Flag was then hoisted on the flag staff of the Police Lines to the accompaniment of the bugle The revolutionary army fired from 54 musketry, three times, under the command of Ganesh Ghosh and shouted "Bande Mataram", "Inquilab Zindabad" three times in honour of the National Flag

It had been earlier decided that after the capture and occupation of the Police Armoury, it would be the next Headquarters of the revolutionaries All the groups deployed to capture and attack other centres of Government Power, were to return to the Police Armoury after completing their tasks

Accordingly, the group under the leadership of Ambikada, deployed to attack and destroy the Telegraph and Telephone Building, soon returned in the newly purchased "Chevrolet" car They were allowed entry to the Police armoury, after observing the due precautions and on pre arranged signals Masterda enquired from Ambikada whether they could destroy the Telegraph and Telephone building as planned Ambikada replied that the Telephone and Telegraph Building had been set on fire and had been gutted by that time

The Auxiliary Force Armoury lay on the western outskirt of Chittagong town by the side of the main road, leading to Pahartali It was at ground level approached from the main road The nearby hills were occupied by Europeans, high Government officials Railway officers, and other Europeans Residences of the Indians lay far away from the place

At the appointed time at 10 p m that night, a group of revolutionaries, under the leadership of Lokenath Baul entered the compound of the Auxiliary Force Armoury, in a 'Dodge' car, driven by Makhan Ghose,[14] Lokenath Bauljee, Nirmal Sen were clad in military uniform of high officials Others also were in military uniforms of suitable rank Occupants of the car were—Lokenath Baul Nirmal Sen Rajat Sen,[1] Subodh Chowdhury [16] Fani Nandy[1] and Makhan Ghose Another group of revolutionaries—Santi Nag,[18] Netai Ghose [19] Kalipada Chakrabarty[20] and Prabhash Baul[1] wearing suitable military uniform followed the car on foot—from nearby places of their concealment Makhan Ghose stopped the car at the landing of the Armoury Building—one of them smartly got down from the front seat—opened the rear door like orderlies of high military officers Lokenath and Nirmalda got down from

the car climbed the steps keeping right hand with arms at their back Two others followed them as their body guards The sentry on duty saluted them With the rifle in present arm position with a thud on the butt and click of his heels Before he could complete present arm position—fire was opened at point blank range The sentry collapsed where he stood Nir malda Rajat and others opened fire on other sentries resting in the nearby guard room One of the sentries stretched to catch hold of his rifle but before he could do so he was shot at and lay wounded Other sentries fled for their lives in whichever direc tion they could The auxiliary force armoury was thus captured by the ten revolutionaries within minutes and rejoiced their victory by shouting slogans— Bande Mataram Inquilab Zindabad Long live revolution

Sergeant major Ferrel in-charge of the Auxiliary Force Armoury resided in his quarters within the compound of the Armoury He came out of his Bungalow and shouted at the re volutionaries— who are you? What do you want? —and pro ceeded towards the Armoury

One of the revolutionaries Santi Nag posted to guard the entrance to the Armoury fired at Sergeant Major Ferrel from his post at the Eastern Corner with the double barrelled breach loader gun injuring Sgt Ferrel He lay in a pool of blood and whispered to his wife to ring up the Police On hearing this— Lokenath ordered charge Bayonet One of the revolutionaries who had the rifle of the sentry rushed and pierced the heart of Srgt Ferrel Mrs Ferrel standing on the verandah of the quar ters gave out a foul cry Lokenath ordered her to remain inside the quarters and told her that no harm would be done to her by the revolutionaries

The occupation of the Auxiliary Force Armoury was com pleted by the ten revolutionaries with the help of revolvers/pis tols breach loader guns and the captured rifles

Guard arrangements having been made the magazine room door was forced open by tying the door to the frame of the car by a strong marine cord The car was set in motion and the door came of its frame A large number of army rifles magazines re volvers and some Luis guns came into the possession of the re volutionaries—but not a single cartridge for them could be traced

At the time a military officer drove inside the Armoury compound in a car As soon as he got down from the car, without signals, he was fired at He fell down but rolled away behind a nearby bush amidst showers of bullets fired at him Within a few minutes of this incident, Captain Tait, Commandant of the Auxiliary Force, along with a group of persons halted outside the compound Probably they came on receipt of report about the assault on the armoury and its capture by the revolutionaries Capt Tait resembled Lokenath Baul in uniforms Lokenath Baul shouted at the group— Halt' Not a step further or I will shoot you" Capt Tait shockingly, replied back— Halt' Bangali Kutta Halt' Lokenath reacted by ordering his group loudly to get ready with bombs, ignite the fuse—charge, and opened fire on the group This was sufficient to vanquish the courage of the Captain and his group who vanished from the place within twinkling of an eye

It was our earlier decision to send reinforcement and establish contact with the Auxiliary Force group from the Police Armoury Accordingly, I along with Hargopal Baul,- Himangshu Sen and Manoranjan Sen proceeded to the Auxiliary Force armoury in the Chevrolet car Coming near the Auxiliary Force Armoury we gave the settled signal and shouted slogans—"Bande Mataram', Long live Revolution' Our friends welcomed us—Lokenath told us to approach the Armoury from the northern side and we did as we were told Reaching the group we congratulated them for their success But Lokenath reported that though they could get hold of a large number of army vehicles and Luis Guns they could not find a single bullet This was a disastrous set-back in our plan and was the signal cause for the defeat of the military strategy of the revolutionaries Had we got the ammunition for the four hundred army rifles and seven Luis guns the history of the Chittagong Uprising would have been a different one

Be that as it may we immediately decided to carry all the revolvers and as many army rifles and some Luis guns as we could in the two cars to the Police armoury and the rest were to be destroyed

These were collected in heaps and crashed by blows from heavy hammers Petrol carried in five or six tins were spread all over the place and order was given to set fire to the armoury

building Fire was ignited by Subal Chowdhury [1] and Rajat Sen We left the armoury building amidst shouts of Bande Mataram , — Inquilab Zindabad —leaving six dead bodies six or seven damaged and broken cars of the enemy near the armoury Just when we were loading the two cars we noticed headlights of a standing motor car at a distance of about 50/60 yards There was no response from when it was challenged Immediately order was issued to fire on the car—and three musketry opened fire on the car There was no response from the other side even then four or five of us rushed towards the car I too did so holding two revolvers in two hands

This was the car of the District Magistrate Dead body of his orderly was lying in the rear seat, with a double barrel breach loader gun and a box of cartridges lying by his side It was obvious that the District Magistrate had fled in the mean time

After bidding farewell to the Auxiliary Force Armoury we returned to the Police Armoury in the two cars Nirmalda gave a brief account of the developments and capture of the Auxiliary Force Armoury and the dismal fact about the non availability of the bullets for the four hundred army rifles and seven Luis guns This information made Masterda pensive and brooding This created a series of problems to our original plan

We had captured the two important armouries communication by telephone and telegraph had been dislocated movement by train had been disconnected at two points leaflets were being distributed giving call to the youths of Chittagong declaring the uprising and asking them to join the revolutionary army next morning How could they be equipped with arms how could the revolutionaries withstand the attack by the enemy which was sure to occur with the inferior quality musketry and short range revolvers?

NOTES

1 Surya Sen—Supreme Leader of Chittagong Uprising 1930
2 Ganesh—Ganesh Ghosh
3 Lokenath Baul
4 Nirmal Sen
5 Ambikada—Ambika Chakraborty } Members of the Revolutionary High Commands
6 Kanailal Dutta—Martyr hanged Alipore Jail 1911
7 Naresh Roy
8 Tripura Sen
Numbers 9 to 24 } All participants in Chittagong Uprising, 1930

CHITTAGONG UPRISING AND THE ROLE OF MUSLIMS

KALPANA JOSHI (*nee* DUTT)

The Chittagong uprising is one of the most striking episodes in our country's march towards freedom. The contribution that the Chittagong group of revolutionaries made under the leadership of Surya Sen to our country's revolutionary movement is unique not only in their armed confrontation with the highly mechanised British Army but also in carrying on the fight for about four years when Chittagong was virtually under complete military control.

The Chairman of the Chittagong Branch of the European Association wrote to the Political Secretary Government of Bengal on the revolutionary outbreak in Chittagong during which events occurred which have no parallel in Bengal since the Mutiny of 1857. He added: It was a declaration of war against His Majesty the King by a body of armed and disciplined men calling themselves the Chittagong Branch of the Indian Republican Army" (Home Dept. Political File No. 336/1930).

Eighteenth of April 1930 was the date fixed for the uprising. A plan was drawn up for open armed conflict—widespread actions to raid the government armouries and seize the arms and ammunition, cut off communication lines with places outside Chittagong by destroying Telegraph and Telephone Exchange Buildings and remove railway lines 60 or 70 miles away from the Chittagong town for blocking troops coming into Chittagong from outside.

This Death Programme as it was called had a limited purpose: the revolutionaries did not claim that by their actions they could liberate India from the foreign yoke. They did however believe that by carrying out their well planned programme they could make Chittagong free from British hold at least for a few days. With the arms seized from the armouries they would then march into the town, capture the Imperial Bank and distribute the money amongst poor people, capture also the gun shop—the only

one in the town free the prisoners from the jail and finally pitch themselves on the Fairly Hill on which the Court Building stood A Provisional Revolutionary Government would be declared with Surya Sen (popularly known as Masterda) as President Afterwards when the Government would bring in troops to take back Chittagong they would die fighting—thus creating a legend and setting an example before their countrymen to emulate The name Indian Republican Army Chittagong Branch (IRA) by which the Chittagong revolutionaries called themselves indicated that they had visualised the spreading of their example to the other districts and provinces of India

Surya Sen was indeed formally declared the President of the Provisional Revolutionary Government after the capture of the armouries The Union Jack flying in the compound of the Police Lines was pulled down and the National Flag of India was hoisted instead amidst shouts of Bande Mataram The Proclamation read by the President expressed determination to extend the revolutionary struggle Chittagong is a tiny part of India But it is hoped and expected that the development of today will inspire and impel our countrymen to do likewise everywhere in India and to free our entire motherland from the unholy clutches of the British rulers before long

I Surjya Sen President Indian Republican Army Chittagong Branch do hereby proclaim the existing Council of the Indian Republican Army in Chittagong to form itself into a Provisional Government to carry out the following urgent tasks (among others)

1 To defend and maintain the victory gained today

2 To extend and intensify the armed struggle for national liberation

The first stage of the Death Programme was completed with seven casualties on the British side and none on the side of the revolutionaries The revolutionaries had to move out and march to the town The enemy had been beaten but not annihilated Order was given to destroy all the arms and ammunition which could not be collected carried away Himangshu Sen (Andu) who was entrusted with the job of setting fire after sprinkling petrol ignored in his excitement to take precautions which he was meticulously taught to take The result was disastrous The 17 year old Himang-

shu caught fire and cried for Ananta Singh to save him from his terrible suffering

There was a moment's indecision—to shoot down the boy on the spot and follow the planned programme of marching immediately to the centre of the town or not As no order was forthcoming—neither from the President Surya Sen, nor from the Commander in Chief Ganesh Ghosh, Ananta Singh took his own decision There flashed in his mind the incident when just a month before the Uprising Day (April 18) Tarakeswar Dastidar while making bombs got very badly burnt and implored Ananta Singh to shoot him dead for the safety of the party and Ananta Singh was about to pull the trigger of the revolver when Ganesh Ghosh prevented him from doing so Tarakeswar Dastidar lived and was the President of the Indian Republican Army after Surya Sen's arrest and died on the same day on the gallows with Masterda at mid night of January 12, 1934 The human sentiment prevailed, Ananta Singh decided to carry the badly burnt boy in his car to a safe shelter in town for his treatment Ganesh Ghosh, Jivan Ghosal and Ananda Gupta accompanied him *

The four expected that Masterda (Surya Sen) would lead the main group from the Police Lines to the town as per previous plan while Masterda and others expected Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh back at the Police Lines after arranging a safe shelter for Himangshu

It was at this psychological and critical moment that Ambica Chakraborty directed the revolutionary band to proceed towards the not—too distant hill ranges This was how Ananta Singh Ganesh Ghosh and the two younger comrades got detached from the main body

This incident changed the later course of the plan The plan for the positional fight atop the Fairy Hill at the heart of the town did not come off Instead the young revolutionaries marched on hungry and thirsty, seeking for a safe place in the jungles of th Chittagong Hill ranges When they reached the Jalalabad hill it was already morning of the April 22 1930 Basing themselves on report and casual information the Authorities started combine operations At 4 PM on the April 22 the revolutionaries were spotted In the first round of attack the Government troops were

*This was Ananta Singh's explanation when asked by the writer

at a very disadvantageous position as they had to fight from below Later from atop a higher hill they opened fire Twelve revolutionaries gave their lives in the battle But the enemy stopped fighting and retreated when it grew dark after four hours of heavy fighting The District Magistrate of Chittagong while deposing as a witness in the Armoury Raid Case trials said that it was under his order that the troops were withdrawn The conservative estimate of casualties on their side was sixtyfour with many more wounded The Captain of the troops brought from Agartalla as reinforcements confessed to a railway employee that they had heavy casualties

In the days following April 18 the administrative authority at Chittagong was made completely ineffective The European population in panic spent their nights on the steamers anchored near the mouth of the Bay of Bengal till the Government reinforcements started pouring into Chittagong town from outside

The first martyrs of the Chittagong Uprising were the twelve boys, almost all in their teens, eleven bodies were found on the Jalalabad hill next morning, of Harigopal Baul (Tegra), Tripura Sen Bidhu Bhattacharya Naresh Roy, Nirmal Lala, Pulin Bikash Ghosh Prabhash Bal Jitendra Das Gupta and Sasanka Dutta Ardhendu Dastidar was picked up in a seriously wounded condition and he died in the hospital after two days

Another young boy Amarendra Nandy who was sent by Masterda (Surya Sen) to the town on April 21 for reconnaisance was spotted under a culvert on April 24, 1930 He fought and died riddled with bullets He preferred death to surrender

The nationalist paper *Swadhinata* patronised by the Jugantar Party came out with bold headlines on April 24 1930

'Bravo Chittagong!

'After patient and persistent endeavours for many years you have familiarised Bengal with success you have not only shown the face of success to the nation not only saved the self-respect of a disgraced people but also roused the revolutionary consciousness of a nation Let more and more workers come out today with the ideal of a wider life and the example set by Chittagong let the prestige and power of a foreign ruler and his self-infatuation be reduced to dust in

district after district let the nation rush forward from one success to another removing the lack of self confidence of a dependent nation (Extracts—translated from Bengali)

The Government wrote in the Memorandum on the history of Terrorism in India 1930 33 The news of this coup unprecedented in the annals of terrorist crimes in Bengal was received by *revolutionaries all over the province* with a marked delight The effect was electrifying and from that moment the outlook of the Bengal terrorists changed The younger members of all parties whose hands had been restrained by the leaders clamoured for a chance to emulate the Chittagong terrorists The romantic appeal of the raid attracted into the fold of the terrorist party women and young girls who from this time onwards assisted the terrorists as housekeepers messengers custodian of arms and sometimes as comrades

The Jugantar Party had powerful branches in practically every district of Bengal Accord ng to Government In May the leaders of the main Jugantar Party in Calcutta drew up a programme of widespread terrorism and made fairly largescale arrangements for the manufacture of bombs To quote from the Government Memorandum mentioned above The magnitude of these proposals demonstrates the height to which the ambition of terrorists had been raised by the Chittagong outbreak

A few instances of the period are given below

On August 25 1930 an attempt was made by Anuja Sen and Dinesh Majumdar to murder the Commissioner of Police Sir Charles Tegart One of the bombs exploded prematurely and killed Anuja Sen Dinesh Majumdar who managed to run away a short distance was caught and sentenced to death

The murder of Lowman Inspector General of Police on August 25 1930 by Benoy Krishna Bose a medical student took place under the auspices of the Shri Sangha of Dacca

On December 8 1930 three young men dressed in European cloth s rushed into the office of Colonel Simpson Inspector General of Prisons at the Writers Building in Calcutta and shot him dead After this they went down the corridor firing into the rooms of other officials and wounded Townshend ICS Secretary to the Government of Bengal and Nelson ICS the Legal

Remembrancer These three young revolutionaries were later trapped in the latter's room all the three tried to commit suicide One (Badal Gupta) died on the spot The other two Benoy Krishna Bose (who had killed Lowman at Dacca and absconded) and Dinesh Gupta were found in a serious condition Benoy Krishna Bose died a few days later Dinesh Gupta recovered and was hanged for the murder of Simpson on July 7 1931

The Midnapore group of Bengal Volunteers (B V) succeeded in killing three magistrates consecutively in the three years during 1931 1933 On April 7 1931 James Peddie I C S the District Magistrate was shot dead by two young revolutionaries Bimal Das Gupta and Jatijiban Ghosh while the Magistrate was attending the Educational Exhibition on the premises of the Collegiate School on its final day The two boys escaped without leaving any trace Robert Douglas the District Magistrate after Peddie was killed on April 30 1932 at about 6 p m while he was presiding over the District Board officials meeting Two boys Prabhangshu Sekhar Pal and Pradyot Bhattacharya entered the meeting room covered him from both the sides and shot him dead Only Pradyot Kumar could be caught and was hanged The third District Magistrate to die was B E J Burge A sportsman and football fan he was to play on behalf of the Town Club against the Mohammedan Sporting Club on September 2 1933 The moment Burge got out of the car two boys rushed towards him and shot at him pointblank Burge fell down dead and so also the two boys Anathbandhu Panja and Mrigenda Kumar Dutta from the bullets of the armed bodyguards of the Magistrate Amongst thirteen arrested after the incident for Conspiracy three were sentenced to death Ramkrishna Roy and Brojakishore Chakrabarty were hanged on October 25 1933 and Nirmaljiban Ghosh on the following day

In December 1931 two school girls Santi Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury of Class VIII of High English School for Girls at Comilla shot the District Magistrate dead in his own bungalow Both the girls were sentenced to transportation for life

In February 1932 during the University Convocation in Calcutta Bina Das a graduate of Calcutta University shot at the Governor for which she got nine years of rigorous imprisonment

In 1934 at the Lebong Race Course at Darjeeling the Governor

was shot at by two young school boys of Dacca One of the boys Bhavani Bhattacharya was hanged Ujjala Majumdar also a school girl from Dacca was sentenced to fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment and two other boys got long term imprisonment for their involvement in this incident

The Anushilan Party from the beginning of 1930 was also preparing for an uprising on an all India scale The Inter Provincial Conspiracy Case which was started in August 1933 with forty persons as accused revealed wide spread conspiracy in many other provinces but specially in the Punjab In all these provinces outside Bengal the important leaders of the Anushilan Party were from Bengal The Titagarh Conspiracy Case started in November 1935 Out of thirtythree one was given transportation for life one twelve years rigorous imprisonment and fifteen others various terms including Parul Mukherjee who was given three years of rigorous imprisonment Below is given a numerical estimate of important events only in Bengal in the following years (compiled from the figures given in *Terrorism in India 1917-1936* a Government publication)—

Year	*Number of important actions*
1930 (after 18th April)	52
1931	99
1932	107
1933	40
1934	21
1935	8
1936	5

The number of persons (male) arrested and dealt with under BCLA Act, 1930 was 2 167 in 1931 and under Regulation III of 1818 21 (source from the Memorandum) The number of female detenus detained in jail and interned at home was about 45

GUERILLA WARFARE

To return to Chittagong the decision to continue the struggle by guerilla methods was Masterda's contribution to the revolutionary struggle Masterda believed that Chittagong fulfilled many of the conditions required for the 'hit and run' tactics of guerilla warfare

The whole of the district of Chittagong and the neighbouring districts and the provinces of Burma and Assam could be crossed on foot through jungles and forests and by country boats like sampan Masterda had confidence in the five hundred strong group of cadres left intact in the villages unsuspected and untouched by the police and he had tremendous faith in the strong nationalism of the Chittagong people In 1921 the success of the non cooperation movement in Chittagong brought spontaneous admiration from the national leaders In 1905 in the boycott movement the Chittagong people not only boycotted the British goods but also boycotted the British Commercial Naval Company The Chittagong people joined hands with the Chakma rebels of Chittagong Hill Tracts who fought for 14 years with their primitive weapons Innumerable instances could be cited to show the deep rooted nationalist feeling of the Chittagong people And Masterda did not have any doubt that the successes on the April 18 and the battle on the Jalalabad Hill on the April 22 would have tremendous impact on the Chittagong people

Below are some of the important events during the phase of the guerilla warfare

On the May 5 1930 Rajat Sen Debaprasad Gupta Swadesh Roy Monoranjan Sen Subodh Chowdhury and Tarindra Nandi started from the village shelter for the town to attack the European Club They took a sampan immediately and could reach only the other side of the river Karnafuli when they were spotted and chase followed One of the two boys Subodh Chowdhury who lagged a little behind was captured and Tarindra Nandi got separated from the other four in the confusion when one of the villagers Mansur Ali hid him in his own house under a machan (fuel shed) The four others ran on and on till the early hours of the morning of the May 6 when they approached one old Muslim couple for some food and drink and shelter Realising very well who they could be the old couple was overwhelmed with sorrow and compassion The old man having directed them to hide in the field covered with shrubs and lemps carried to them all the food that he had left over after the previous night It was very little indeed To the boys he promised to bring rice and dry fish curry (relished by Chittagonians) when it would get dark Long before the darkness set in the four boys Rajat Sen Debaprasad Gupta Manoranjan Sen and Swadesh Roy were spotted Order for sur

render from the Police and the Military was responded with revolver shots They fought till the last until all of them died This was recorded as the Kalarpole fight

Arrests went on Boys were caught some from home and some others from the hiding places Amongst the arrested were *the fathers of* Debaprasad Gupta *and* Rajat Sen *both of whom* were killed in Kalarpole fight and the father of Anantalal Singh On June 28, 1930 Ananta Singh surrendered in Calcutta informing beforehand the Inspector General of Police Lowman and all the editors of the newspapers—*Amrita Bazar Patrika Statesman, Basumati* and *Jyoti* of Chittagong of the day and time when he would come It created a lot of sensation Nobody not even Masterda could explain this surrender except that this step of Ananta Singh resulted in the three boys who had previously made statements before the police all retracting them at the Court

The Armoury Raid Case started on July 24 1930 with the twentynine arrested Ananta Singh did not lose any time to make contact with Masterda underground and in planning for actions He used one of the bailed undertrials Ardhendu Guha for the purpose

On September 2 1930 some Chittagong absconders were ambushed in a house in Chandannagar In the ensuing fight Jiban Ghosal got killed and Ananda Gupta and the two leaders Ganesh Ghosh and Lokenath Baul were caught Also arrested were two revolutionaries Suhashini Ganguli and Sasadhar Acharya (belonging to the Jugantar group of Bhupendra Kumar Dutta) who played the part of husband and wife to normalise the shelter

With the arrest of the three at Chandannagar the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case trial started anew (de novo) on September *11 1930* with a total of thirtytwo accused on trial

The decision taken by Masterda (Surya Sen) to prolong the proceedings of the case as long as possible was conveyed to Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh in order to plan out the escape of the prisoners

On the information received from a police officer while in court Ananta Singh sent a message to Masterda on the arrival of D I G of Police, Craig in Chittagong and his departure from Chittagong on December 1 Ramkrishna Biswas and Kalipada Cha

krabarty were deputed to kill Craig at Chandpur, the station where he had to alight to catch the steamer on his way back to Calcutta They killed, instead, Tarini Mukherjee, the Inspector of Police accompanying Craig by mistake Ramkrishna Biswas was sentenced to be hanged and Kalipada Chakrabarty to transportation for life

On March 12 1931, in the village Barama, two absconding revolutionaries, Tarakeswar Dastidar and Binode Dutta, confronted a group of armed police The two escaped after shooting the DIB Inspector, Sasanka Bhattacharya who had chased them The passers-by on the road and the women who were taking their morning bath in a pond nearby, had all seen the two absconders and the running police but denied to the police party having *seen anybody passing by anywhere*

Inspite of heavy repressive measures arrests etc and Chittagong being virtually under complete military control, the activities of the Chittagong revolutionaries went on unabated A plan for widespread attacks on Government officials and institutions had been formulated in minutest detail by Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh in jail and was sent to Masterda underground for approval

Masterda approved of the whole plan covering both outside and inside jail He strongly recommended my name to Ananta Singh to involve me without reservations in this plan I had the advantage of belonging to a family from where nobody would expect anybody to go in for secret activities, let alone a girl I had an extra advantage too of being a very good student and looking much younger than my 17 years I was contacted by Masterda in 1930 when I had come back home in May from Calcutta for summer holidays As advised by him I stayed in Chittagong instead of going back to Calcutta to continue my studies in Bethune College in Intermediate Science (I Sc) Course During this period I was being given training in handling pistols and revolvers and dressing and walking like boys in male dress—European and Indian Revolvers and pistols were kept in my custody every now and then to be sent to prison By now I was in regular contact with Masterda underground and Anantada and Ganeshda in prison In February 1931 I was assigned to secure ninety pounds of sulphuric acid and nitric acid for preparation

of gun cotton and other explosives, and I was directed to go to Calcutta for this purpose In Calcutta I was greatly helped by Kamala Chatterjee (now Mukherjee), Renu Roy and Amita Sen of Jugantar Party and by Nalini Pal of Chittagong who brought a part of the procured acids to Chittagong My next assignment almost immediately after my return to Chittagong was to prepare gun cotton at home, formula was sent from prison by Anantada and Ganeshda This I started doing in right earnest without arousing any suspicion even from the family members Being a science student they thought it was quite natural for me to indulge in practical experiment work as preparation for my final examination in March, 1931 Ultimately I got a ciphered letter from Anantada explaining elaborately the whole town plan and my role in it—the switching on" of the electric connections for igniting the explosives (dynamites) put under the ground at different important places of the town It was to be a 'one person' job at the final stage Unfortunately the discovery was made by the Authorities before the preparations was fully complete

According to Government records, On the 5th of May while the ground in front of the cells in the Chittagong jail occupied by the Armoury Raid Case undertrials was being dug up a cigarette tin containing two 12 volt electric bulbs was discovered A thorough search of the jail yard ensued and resulted in the discovery of daggers knives, explosive materials a 450 bore revolver (stolen during the Chittagong Armoury Raid) some ammunition and a dry cell electric battery' (*Terrorism in India* 1917-1936 edited by J M Want Director, I B)

Security was tightened Curfew order was imposed again Bails were cancelled of six undertrials in the Armoury Raid Case On the June 22 another conspiracy was unearthed by the Government The Abstract of Intelligence Report Vols I-XXXIX, gives the account as follows "When such things were going on inside the jail premises terrorists who were still out and undetected succeeded in setting up several improvised dynamites under the Court Building Three such dynamites were recovered from a vacant house"

The authorities in Bengal were seriously perturbed after the discovery of these two conspiracies Within two months on

August 30 1931 before they could deal with the situation the notorious Deputy Superintendent of Police Khan Bahadur Asanullah was shot dead by a sixteen year old boy Haripada Bhattacharyya at the football ground in Chittagong town in broad daylight Terrible repression started all over the district of Chittagong The Authorities tried unsuccessfully to fan a communal riot the Police and the European officers smashed the Press machinery of the nationalist daily *Panchajanya* looting of Hindu shops by anti social elements instigated openly by the police and magistracy could not go far due to the intervention of the local Muslim leaders When a jury trial was instituted against Haripada for the murder of Asanullah nobody neither a Hindu nor a Muslim volunteered to give evidence not even the eye witnesses identified Haripada as Asanullah's assasin However the verdict of not Guilty by the jury was overridden by the Authority by referring the case to the High Court which sentenced him to transportation for life The Report of the Non official Enquiry Committee on Chittagong disturbances after Asanullah's murder reveals the enormities of Police atrocities In vain did the local authorities try to sponsor communal disturbances (See Appendix I)

The Bengal Government at this stage sought temporary truce with the Chittagong revolutionaries in September 1931 The Authority sounded the attitude of the Chittagong revolutionaries by posing the question of Death Penalty vis a vis the complete cessation of revolutionary activities in Bengal Farmer D I G and Rai Bahadur Manmatha Sen D S P approached Ananta Singh in jail The proposal was rejected outright The counter proposal as advised by Masterda was thus placed by Ananta Singh if none of the Chittagong Armoury Raid accused was sentenced to death and if the boys arrested in connection with Dynamite Conspiracy were released the undertrials in the Chittagong jail would stop the dilatory tactics in the Court proceedings and would not resort to conspiratorial activities while inside jail The decision arrived at ultimately was that the maximum of three years would be given to Ardhendu Guha and to the other seven ranging from two years nine months if they plead guilty The government had eventually to accept this compromise on terms forwarded by the revolutionaries

Dynamite conspiracy case was formally instituted on Septem

ber 29, 1931 with the eight arrested and the judgment was given on the same day in accordance with the compromise arrived at And none of the accused in the Armoury Raid Case was sentenced to death The judgment was given on March 2, 1932 (Sources (1) The event as narrated by Masterda to the writer, (2) *Chittagong Heroes Fight For Freedom*—written serially by Ananta Singh in *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta)

The following extracts from the secret document, Government of Bengal, Political Department, Political No 1490 P & T of the letter from R N Reid Esq C I E I C S, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India (Home Department) on October 10, 1931 given an idea of the government's desperation (9828)

It is unnecessary to explain to the Government of India that conditions in Chittagong have for long been giving the local government anxiety which has not been lessened by the last terrorist outrage of 30th August with its resulting communal consequences It had been clear for some time that this situation is of so abnormal a character that normal methods of procedure have failed and must be replaced by some form of special powers, and the Governor in Council feels that resort to special powers should no longer be delayed

It will probably assist the Government of India in coming to a decision on this case if a brief history of events since the raid of 18th April 1930 is furnished Action taken by the police resulted in thirtytwo persons being sent up to trial and a Special Tribunal under the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act 1925 was constituted for their trial The trial commenced on 24th July 1930 but more important accused were captured on 2nd September, 1930 at Chandarnagore and the trial began *de novo* on 11th September 1930 It has been going on ever since Later deliberately obstructive factors have been used in order to prolong the proceedings and it seems that the judges have been unable to deal effectively under the existing powers with this obstruction Some 17 men who took part in the raid were known to have escaped, and the majority of them under the leadership of Surjya Sen in whom they have great faith and who was one of the chief organisers of the raid itself, remained in the district They appear never to have moved very far from Chittagong and have in fact been seen by agents in Chittagong town itself Surjya

sen has been organising unceasingly during all this period and it has been an easy task for him to get impressionable youths only too glad to place themselves under such a hero During the trial there is no doubt that regular communication has been kept up between these absconders and the undertrials in jail by various means and in particular through certain of the accused who are or were on bail It is known that plans have constantly been made ever since the trial began to rescue the prisoners, destroy the members of the tribunal murder the district officials to blow up the jail wall and to commit dacoities

"In April 1931 matters came to a crisis It was clear that something on a large scale was being planned the local officers represented that the situation has passed beyond their control and, as was explained in the Government Letters No 45 P S— D dated 20th April 1931 to the Government of India The Government called in the assistance of the military

'The security measures taken to meet the menacing situation have been as follows Since the raid of 18th April last (1930) year as large a body of armed police and Eastern Rifles as could possibly be spared have been stationed at Chittagong To them were added the detachment of 1 8 Gurkhas from 21st April to 10th May, when it was reduced to one Company to be replaced in turn on 30th May by 200 men of Assam Rifles As the situation improved their force was reduced to 150 men in August A European officer has been in charge of the jail ever since April last Outside the town, a force of 120 additional police was imposed under section 15 of the Police Act with effect from the 29th April 1931, and constant efforts have been made by them reinforced by parties from Chittagong itself to trace the absconders So good is the latter's system of intelligence so vigilant is the watch of their spies that all efforts have failed

But there can be no peace in the district no freedom from anxiety until the offensive is taken against these absconders and they are captured and speedily tried when found or so broken up and scattered that they will no longer be a source of danger

'His Excellency in Council is convinced that all efforts should be concentrated on this one object but such efforts are useless unless they are backed up by extra ordinary powers designed to deal with an extraordinary situation There is no necessity to

contemplate martial law The civil authorities given extra powers, can cope with the situation Last, but not the least, I am to impress very strongly that a serious factor in the situation is the exasperation which is felt both by Europeans and Mussalmans, of which ample evidence was given in the events subsequent to the recent murder of the Muhammedan Inspector Tempers are frayed and nerves worn with long strain and the perpetual shadow of an intangible danger The Governor in Council is of opinion that conditions in Chittagong are such as to fall to a localised extent in no way short of emergency The situation there is totally abnormal and required the exercises of abnormal powers to deal with it '

On October 9 1931 Act XXIII of 1931 (an Act to provide against publication of matter inciting to or encouraging murder or violence) was passed, and on October 29 the Government of India promulgated Ordinance IX of 1931 conferring the powers asked for in regard to arrest and detention and widening the schedule of offences by the inclusion of sections relating to the waging of war against the King or protecting the absconders On November 30 the Bengal Emergency Power Ordinance XI of 1931 was issued All these ordinances were made into the ' Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrage Act 1932 and the Bengal Criminal Law (Arms & Explosives) Act 1932, passed by the Legislative Council These were implemented in right earnest

Masterda decided to spread out the activities of the Chittagong group to the other neighbouring districts Cadres were sent to Dacca Noakhali and Comilla to get information of the situation in these places and about the high European officials Accordingly Saroj Guha was sent to Dacca He shot at the District Magistrate Durno on October 28 1931 in a crowded street of Dacca and escaped Shailesh Roy a member of the Indian Republican Army (IRA) Chittagong Branch shot at and killed E B Ellison the Additional Superintendent of Police of Comilla He could not be caught In these actions outside Chittagong district the Chittagong group was helped by the revolutionaries belonging to Jugantar Anushilan and others without any reservations

As mentioned earlier Masterda had been seriously planning to send some girls into action Pritilata Waddedar who had finish-

ed her B A and joined the new High School for Girls as teacher was called from the town for meeting Masterda and Nirmal Sen In the first hours of the night of June 13 1931, the military under Captain Cameron of the Gurkha Rifles raided the place Captain Cameron was killed by Nirmalda s bullet and Nirmalda by Captain Cameron s The young boy Apurba Sen (Bhola) while trying to pilot Masterda and Pritilata out of the military cordon got a bullet in the chest from the soldiers and died instantaneously Masterda and Pritilata escaped Priti was advised to go underground She absconded on July 5 1932

The suspicion against me deepened But still enquiries from the Principal of Chittagong College where I was studying B Sc by this time and the watches upon my movement drew a blank My father was called from Jessore and asked to bring me along with him to meet Police Superintendent Hicks to get a bond signed by me in her own interest in Hicks words if her father agreed instead of taking action against her under B C L A Act As directed by Masterda I accepted the bond on March 27 1932 I was doing almost all the things that I was forbidden to do like reading proscribed literatures removing acids and other chemicals from the laboratory to be used in the preparation of explosives and meeting the carriers from Masterda for sending and receiving messages

Revolutionary slogans and quotations from poems started appearing almost everyday on the walls of the classrooms of this Government College Nobody could be caught in the act of writing them and as nobody volunteered to give information about the source general fines were imposed on all the students without exception The Muslim boys who were supposed to be innocent and unaffected were as silent as the Hindu boys The Hindu hostel and the Buddhist Hostel for students were closed under police orders

Finally Masterda decided to fulfil Nirmaldas aspiration to send Priti and me for joint action On September 16 I was summoned by Masterda to come to the base shelter in Kattali a village not very far from the town I was told that the final date for the action was still not decided On September 17 I was arrested while returning to the base again in male attire On

September 25, 1932 the D I B Inspector Jogendra Lal Gupta visited me in prison and told me about Pritis death on the 24th night Her dead body was found in male attire near the gate of the Pahartali European Club

On September 24, 1932 Pritilata Waddedar was appointed the leader of a group of seven—Pannalal Sen, Shanti Chakravarti, Prafulla Das Bireswar Roy, Mahendra Chowdhury Sushil Dey and Kalikinkar De to attack the European club at Pahartali a suburb of Chittagong town After the mission was fulfilled all the seven escaped but Priti committed suicide by taking potassium cyanide after coming out of the club premises She could have easily escaped, but she pleaded for permission for Masterda to commit suicide and got it The reason for it was given in her statement found in the breast pocket of her shirt 'Women today have taken the firm resolution that they will not remain in the background I earnestly hope that our sisters would no longer nurse the feeling that they are weak With this hope in my heart I am proceeding today for self immolation"

The Government arrested eightyfour young boys to start Pahartali Raid Case but it could not produce any evidence I was to be implicated in this case, as the dress found on Pritilata was identical with mine when I was arrested Besides, the place where I was found on the September 17 was not very far from the Pahartali European Club I was released on bail after a month and kept under home restraint order A case was instituted against me under section 109 I P C While the case was still going on I was directed by Masterda to go underground and come away with the boy who brought the message on December 28 1932 Accordingly I absconded on the same day My picture with my description as tall fair and with long hair was sent round all the military camps and police stations All Hindu families were suspects without exception Muslims they dared not touch—even if they suspected some The vigilance committee sponsored by the authorities had the right to visit any house at any time of the day and night But I was not traceable

It was a common thing to see boys of 12 25 being called to the police stations before it was dark and detained till the morning of the next day It was meant to curb the movement of the absconders

Government measures did hamper the movement of the absconders The old shelters could not be used for long except for one or two days And we had to change shelters very frequently Masterda divided the absconders into small groups to spread out in the less suspected police stations I was with Masterda along with Santi Chakraborty Mani Dutta and Sushil Das Gupta, when we reached the village of Gairala on February 12 1933, Masterda seemed worried It was a general rule that the absconders would go out of the shelter in the evening by 9 p m after finishing food and come back before it was dawn On February 16, at about 10 p m we had already started going out Just near the gate we heard the cry halt the meaning of which was very clear to us We all ran backwards amidst the shower of bullets from the military To my relief, I found Masterda who led me by hand We were six in number including Brojen Sen belonging to the same village He was our pilot to take us out when necessary to places of rendezvous with others. I did not know what happened to the rest of us We had to move I slipped into a ditch and got separated from Masterda and found lecturerda (Mani Dutta) there We could manage to get out of the ditch and with bamboo bushes as cover started firing towards the direction of the rifle shots of sometime afterwards we crawled into the pond nearby belonging to our shelter We knew we could not hold on for long in the midst of cold water and so decided once again to try our luck We crawled out of the pond and climbed into the verandah of the house where we were sheltered

Through the slit of the closed doors of the shelter from where light was coming we found the lady of the house 'Khirode Mashima" and her young son packing up our things in a bundle perhaps to throw them away Subsequently we were out in an open field and out of the reach of the military and the police Bagh dandi was the nearest village in the same Patiya Police Station as Gairala We managed to reach one of the cadres of the IRA Haren Chakravarty (who was later sentenced to death in 1934 in the Cricket Match Shooting Case) of this village who took us to the house of Lakshmin De His father was also sympathetic to the Chittagong revolutionaries We were put up in the 'gola' (local term for the place where paddy was stocked) We were

trying to dry up our cartridges and wipe out water from the revolvers when his father not aware of the fact that we were there, opened the small door of the 'gola' and got shocked to see us there It did not need anybody to tell him that we could be none else but the swadeshiwallas' who had been fighting against the military the previous night And I could easily be identified as Kalpana Dutt As the village Gourala was very near to this village and as his son Lakshman De was also in the list of the suspects his father told us to quit the place immediately as it was not safe for us and also he and the whole family would be finished if we were found there We had to leave His son Lakshman De came out with us to escort us to another village next to this My peculiar dress could not hide my identity and the villagers came out of their houses and followed us—the crowd for a while swelling larger and larger as we moved We ran on, while the villagers pursued us only to have a look at us Shanti Chakravarti who had got a bullet through his chest during the fight also managed to escape and passed through the same village leaving a trail of blood all the way up to the shelter in another village (Habilashdwip) which was our destination too On the morning of May 20 the military and the police reached this very place but Shanti Chakravarti could not be found there He was shifted to another place as soon as the military and the police left It was at this place that we came to know about this incident and of Masterda's arrest

Masterda was caught immediately after I fell into the ditch Rumours went round that Kalpana Dutt was seriously wounded during the fight As soon as the news of Masterda's arrest reached the villages around Gairola the people thronged on both sides of the road presuming that he would be taken to the police station by that way People could not believe and had never believed that Masterda could be caught And when they saw Masterda in shackles and showing unmistakable signs of physical torture all over his body a grimness settled over their faces betraying deep sorrow and also determination with tears rolling down their faces The military and the police did not fail to notice the reverence and love of the people for Masterda

The Authorities secretly took Masterda to Chittagong town

The people did not forsake us—Masterda's disciples They, in fact sheltered and fed us till the last

After Masterda s arrest the burden of leadership fell automatically on Tarakeswar Dastidar only 23 years old who had been the lieutenant to Masterda all the time after Nirmal Sen s death in Dalghat in June 1932

Nobody in the village informed the police and the military of the direction we had taken that day when we had to come out for a different shelter in the broad daylight The crowd invariably included both Hindus and Muslims In fact from this time onwards we were being sheltered most of the time in Muslim houses when we were being chased by the military and the police Unfortunately I did not know the names of many of our shelters, even the names of many of the villages where we had been given shelters were unknown to me

However planning for actions did not stop The question of rescuing Masterda from the prison was seriously taken up And a few smaller actions had also been attempted The major plan for Masterda s rescue was foiled by the capture of Sailesh Roy when he was about to hand over a message through a jail warder to Masterda

It was on May 16 that we had reached Gahira, a sea-side village in the southern part of Chittagong We were given shelter at Purna Talukdar s On May 18 as usual as soon as it was dark we left the shelter for the sea beach However, we had to hasten back to the shelter at about 2 a m as seeing some lights being focussed on the top of the mango trees surrounding the house of Purna Talukdar It was already the morning of May 19 1933 We were four—Tarakeswar Dastidar (called Futuda) Sudhindra Das Manoranjan Das who had joined us recently and myself None had any arms except Futuda who had two revolvers and the one with me The military had already cordoned the house Fighting ensured The call for surrender from the police outside was replied by us with bullets from our revolvers A heart-rending cry 'My elder brother has been killed' could be heard from outside Purna Talukdar the head of the family, when asked to come out with his hands up could not follow what was

being asked of him It was only on that ground that he was done to death The next one to get the bullet on the chest was his brother Nishi Talukdar Womenfolk were wailing on the veran dah small children were running helter skelter on the courtyard amidst showers of bullets not understanding what had been hap pening We continued firing through the window of the room till all our cartridges were exhausted Just at the moment when we were planning to make a dash out to take a chance if at least one could escape a bullet through the open window killed our 16 year old comrade Manoranjan Das In this situation there were only two courses open to us—to give ourselves up that is to surrender which would stop the firing of the military and save the shelter giver s family from more deaths or alternatively to sit quietly in the room till the soldiers closed up their cordon round our room and forced us to surrender and not bothering about the deaths that might occur to the family members of Purna Talukdar The decision for surrender was taken As the call for surrender was for me I insisted that the three revolvers with us should be handed over to the military by me only so that if no arms were found on Tutuda he would not be taken as the lea der and be hanged On the other hand if I were to be hanged Chittagong would be the first from where a girl would be hanged for revolutionary activities

I came out first followed by others passed the dead body of Purna Talukdar in a pool of blood still coming out of his chest and a row of blood stained heads and faces of the young members of the family sitting motionless A miniature battlefield indeed—a sight never to be forgotten Suddenly a slap on my face made me conscious that I was before the Subedar of the Jat Regiment Before I could realise what happened I found the soldiers sur rounding the Subedar telling him She is not to be touched If you raise your hand once again we will not obey you It was incredible My misery faded and my eyes were filled with tears—happy tears with an inexplicable feeling The sacrifice and the struggle of the Chittagong revolutionaries continuously for four years had not then gone in vain It had touched the heart of the very soldiers who were deemed heartless mercenaries This in cident was repeated by the soldiers of this regiment who when transferred to Midnapore to keep guard on ailing Suhashini

Ganguli (a detenu after the Chandannagar incident) in hospital

In the Chittagong Armoury Raid First Supplementary Case, which started on January 3, 1933, Ambika Chakraborty and Saroj Guha were sentenced to transportation for life

On June 15 1933 the Armoury Raid Second Supplementary Case was started with Masterda, Futuda, and myself on trial The judgement was passed on August 14, 1933 sentencing both Masterda and Futuda to death and me to transportation for life

The fight still continued with another leader Binode Dutta though with much depleted strength Four teenagers attacked the Europeans assembled at the cricket field to watch a match on January 7, 1934 Nitya Ranjan Sen and Himangshu Chakrabarty were shot dead by the sentries there and Haren Chakravarty and Krishna Choudhury were caught on the spot and sentenced to death

Very little organisation was left due to severe repressive measures and detention in jail not sparing even twelve-year old boys

Chittagong revolutionaries were tried in another conspiracy case when they were trying to physically assault one of their comrades for treachery It ended in punishment for Nawab Meah (a Muslim cadre), Abinash Dutta and others in 1937

The last of the Chittagong leaders Binode Dutta was caught in 1941

PART PLAYED BY MUSLIMS AND PEOPLE IN GENERAL DURING THE PERIOD OF CHITTAGONG UPRISING

The British rulers tried to establish that the Armoury Raids and subsequent battle on the Jalalabad Hills and other activities which continued for more than four years as the work of a few Bhadralog youths to which the Muslims were opposed And the activities were concentrated mostly in the Hindu dominated thanas (police stations) of Patiya, Boalkhali, Raojan Rangunia Kotwali, Panchalais, and Doublemooring Chittagong district has two Sadar sub-divisions A and B Only the above mentioned police stations which fall under Sadar Sub division A had been listed A glance at the Tables 1 and 2 given in the Appendix II

will show how it would have been impossible for the Hindu Bhadralog youths to carry on without the sympathy and often active support of the Muslims for such a long time when the whole district was a victim of heavy repressive measures and in fact under military rule And in all police stations except in Chittagong town (Kotwali police station) the percentage of Muslims was much higher than the Hindus

Below are quoted extracts from the Reports of the Government about the elaborate measures taken by it using extraordinary powers, the failure to curb the activities of the revolutionaries and the attitude and involvement of Muslims and people in general during this period

From Report on the operation of Chitforce from 1st December 1931 to 7th March 1932 by the District Magistrate Chittagong, on 9th March 1932 to R N Reid Esqr, Commissioner of the Chittagong Division (Home Dept F No 13/32 Pol)

"The troops and police occupied the area in which according to information, the absconders were obtaining shelter The area extended 700 square miles in thanas Patiya, Boalkhali, Hathazar, Raojan part of Rangunia Kotwali Panchalais and Doublemooring It was divided into six sub areas each under the command of the senior military officers as sub area commanders .

The usual objection was raised about searching women Although the Presidents of the Union Boards were asked if they could supply women searchers for the mufussil none were coming

'On the night of the 2nd December information was received of the presence of absconders in a certain village Arrangements were at once made to cordon the village The village was searched for most of the next day without success On the night of the 3rd/4th December a similar operation was carried out. This was again unsuccessful Both these operations had made it abundantly clear that without very accurate and very early information, plus the ability to act on it in a very short time the difficulties of catching any absconders were enormous

The military officers with the help of the circle officers carried on a continuous propaganda to rouse the public from their apathy

and to assist the forces in their efforts Meetings attended by Presidents and members of Union Boards school teachers and all sections of the public were constantly being held urging co operation of the people Similar propaganda was carried out in the schools and Union Boards were required to organise watch and ward committees for the purpose of keeping trace of the movements of the strangers Notices proclaiming the rewards for the various absconders were widely distributed

Not surprisingly the result still was nil' But, to proceed with the extracts

Early in January (1932) we discussed the situation in the schools with the director of the Public Instruction and expressed our opinion that it was most important to bring pressure to bear on the school authorities to prevent the students being infected with revolutionary ideas The Director agreed and issued a circular declaring a general cut of 25% in the grant of all aided H E Schools* in the area until the Managing Committees have satisfied me that they have taken active steps with parents and teachers to see that the boys are not subject to bad influence either in or out of school In the course of visits to ten schools recently the sub divisional officer obtained from every individual boy a voluntary and public undertaking verbally not to take part in any political I am not so sanguine as to believe that every promise is genuine .

The attitude of the public as a whole towards the police and troops and the action taken under the ordinance was good At the same time they were not generally helpful with information about the absconders Soon after the military activities began the absconders became so careful in their movements that the average Mohamadan villager simply had no information to give Amongst the Hindus there is no doubt that a very considerable section were in a position to give information and deliberately withheld it Another which affected the obtaining of information from the public was the fear of reprisals after the troops and police were withdrawn There was also apathy amongst the law abiding section of inhabitants and the passive and active sym

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Higher English Schools

pathy with the absconders *amongst the Hindus*, which were not to be dispelled until they realised that the Government meant business We have certainly failed in our object viz to capture the absconders in this district

The Magistrate hastened to give explanation

'There is no reason to regard the operation as failure I do not think we could reasonably have expected except with luck, to break up in 3 months an organisation for the concealment of absconders which had been successfully maintained for nearly 2 years Up to date everything has been in favour of the absconders, good weather conditions apathy amongst the large section of the public which is called loyal, active or passive sympathy amongst another section which is known to be disloyal as long as conditions favour that attitude, and all our serious lack of accurate information

Almost every day since promulgation of the Ordinances and Curfew order boys were arrested for giving false information under section 15 of Ordinance, under Rule 16 for using cycles without permit, for possessing cycles without permit, under Sec 188 I P C for breach of the curfew order, under Rule 11 for failing to report a design to damage military property, etc, etc

In the month ending January 30, 1932, 17 Mohammedans were prosecuted for breach of the curfew order On November 16, 1932 a search on information was carried out in the town without result Complaints were made by Mussalmans that the search was not properly conducted Even as late as March 23 1934 after Masterda had been hanged S N Roy additional Secretary to the Government of Bengal, wrote in reply to the police officer Gordon I P that the *desperadoes by reason of their spectacular raid unprecedented in the annals of terrorism in Bengal had obtained a position in the public eye and made an appeal to the imagination of the young hot heads'* It was added that *they count upon sympathy and support not only of the youths but of large sections of people in the countryside both for obtaining shelters and planning further outrages The fact that Muslims and Buddhists have been drawn to the movement is an indication of the virulous nature of infection '* It was also submitted '*that*

curfew orders etc while they have been useful in peculiar conditions of Chittagong have not stopped terrorism or recruitment to the ranks of terrorists in the Chittagong district (emphasis added)

The village Dhalghat and Gairala under the jurisdiction of Paltya Police Station in which the percentage of Muslims was much more than that of the Hindus and the density of population is 1055 per square mile, naturally the movement of the Hindu boys could not have escaped the notice of the local Muslims Our escape from Gairala and running in broad daylight and people recognising me as Kalpana Dutta was never reported to the military stationed not very far away The only exception was provided in Kalarpole on the May 6 when the Muslims chased the revolutionaries and assisted the police in getting them caught Here again most of them were made to believe by the police that they were decoits In fact in the most difficult days when it became impossible for us to stay in a Hindu family and especially for me to stay in a village shelter it was the Muslims who offered on their own to give us shelter Almost the whole of Muslim area was like a fort for us It can never be forgotten that when in a Muslim shelter the old lady would feed us daily with young chicken and a special sauce dish they called chukka and insisted on our eating it for strength

The simple and poor villagers never hesitated in providing us with food and shelter to the best of their ability Their unstinting hospitality was evidence of their warmth After all they must have remained aware of the terrible risk involved Despite their unfamiliarity with intricate political questions they did feel that the revolutionaries were attempting something great and patriotic With their strong commonsense they could realise that patriotism was a virtue that deserved encouragement I cannot for example overlook the case of a village Chowkidar expected to work for the Raj entering our room and promising us information about the movement of the police and the military

All these happened after Masterda's arrest We thought that it would be difficult for us to have shelters with the military concentration increasing fast There was not a single Muslim who had gone and reported against us to the authorities with the hope of getting the declared reward In the case of Ambika Chakraborty's

arrest, the man giving him shelter was himself instrumental in handing him over to the police The Chittagong IRA cadres like Sattar, Mir Ahmad, Fakir Ahmad Meah Tunu Meah Tarini Majhi (a Buddhist) and quite a few other boatmen, who were carrying Masterda and his disciples from place to place and from shelter to shelter were no less participants in the struggle for our country's freedom than any one of us No praise is too high for their courage and attachment to the lofty cause in the face of tremendous hazards

They come, in my opinion, under the same category of the participants, the salt of the earth, who like the revolutionary cadres bravely faced police and military atrocities and even death but without limelight and the grateful recognition by their people which is their due

And as for the government agents and spies, they cannot be categorised as Hindus and Muslims They were a category by themselves—the scum of the earth

Who were these boys and girls who had created the epic, the Chittagong uprising?

They were both Hindu boys and Muslim boys from upper class from middle class and lower class, from the loyalist families and nationalist families, from the peasantry and artisans backed by the sympathy and support of the people in general This fact was unambiguously and copiously brought out in the secret letters and reports of the government officials to their superiors

And there lay the secret of the success of the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch

APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1 Non Official Committee Report on Asanullah murder (Ref p 14) (Printed in London)

At a public meeting held at Calcutta (3rd September 1931) a Non Official Committee was formed to inquire into the Chittagong disturbances after the murder of the Police Inspector Asanullah The Committee consisted of Jatindra Nath Basu, J M Sengupta,

Akram Khan B N Sasmal Dr J M Dasgupta T C Goswami, Satyananda Bose Naresh Sengupta Nripendra Chandra Banerjee, Nisith Chandra Sen and Asrafuddin Choudhuri

The Committee noted that the police had taken revenge on innocent people Happily in many places Hindus were given shelter by Muslim shopkeepers and householders Some selected Muslims had been warned by the police of the possibility of trouble It was clear that the police and the district administration had tried to engineer Hindu Muslim riots on the ground that a Muslim Officer had been murdered by a Hindu The night of August 30 (Sunday) was a night of terror The police particularly attacked the houses of those who had incurred the displeasure of the authorities, including political elements The office of the nationalist and popular newspaper *Panchajanya* was systematically raided and ravaged by a party of Europeans armed with revolvers for publishing photographs of these events Also, there was a planned attack on political suspects and their relations for which Shooter the European A S P, was particularly responsible Rajani Kanta Sen father of Chittaranjan Sen died of injuries deliberately inflicted on him The house of Bepin Behari Sen was raided and he and his daughter were assaulted and the two brothers were taken to the police station

The next day (Monday) information spread that Hindu shops were going to be looted Indeed, since the Armoury Raid, Chittagong had been practically in a state of seige Anti Hindu slogans were heard at places The town was given up to hooligans Disturbances were carried into the interior of the district The Committee reported that everywhere houses were either burnt or wantonly damaged without provocation

The Committee drew attention to the persistent anti nationalist propaganda of the Anglo Indian Press (e g the *Statesman*) The Committee concluded that the incidents of Sunday night (August 30 1931) were arranged by European non officials European Government officials and Mohammedan police In the mofussil the local authorities had engineered the disturbances The obvious purpose was to terrorise people particularly the Hindus' Finally the Committee specifically mentioned Siddiq Dewan Kanchan Mian Pande Ali Azim Shooter and Cran for their direct involvement in the atrocities

APPENDIX II

TABLE I

Area in Sq Mile

Population in 1931 (Religionwise) and Sq Mile

(Compiled from the census 1931 Chittagong District)

District and Police Station	Area in sq mile	All religion Total population district	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	Animist	Others	Density per sq mile
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Chittagong Distt	2,570	1,797,038	1,326,208	392,352	75,499	1,609	1,069	311	699
Sadar Sub division	1,694	1,463,157	1,043,253	367 094	48,941	1,601	1,059	309	864
Police Station—									
1 Chittagong town (P S Kotwali)	4	36,956	15,950	19,393	502	1,080	10	21	9 239
2 Panchlaish	19	46 072	40,595	4,819	550	108	—	—	2 456
3 Doublemooring	33	74,344	57,562	15,934	228	341	—	284	2,253
4 Boalkhali	54	76,406	45 433	28,406	2 566	1	—	—	1,415
5 Patiya	197	207,837	138,439	60 293	9,076	28	1	—	1,055
6 Raojan	94	120,924	67,747	39 946	13,231	—	—	—	1,289
7 Rangunia	134	76 652	50,347	19,605	6,672	7	7	—	572

8	Anwara	61	78 690	55 083	22 665	935	7	—	—	1 290
9	Fatikchari	292	124 534	91 412	28 283	4 293	16	530	—	476
10	Hathazari	102	110 064	87 192	20 636	2 107	9	120	—	1 079
11	Satkania	207	187 827	152 449	31 087	4 287	1	3	—	907
12	Banshkhali	139	106 723	85 196	19 773	1 753	1	—	—	766
13	Mirsarai	172	134 998	94 385	38 211	2 137	2	263	—	725
14	Sitakund	186	81 125	61 463	18 943	604	—	115	—	436
Cox's Bazar Sub division		876	333 881	282 953	24 358	26 558	8	—	2	

Note The mean density for the whole district is 699 per sq mile calculated according to the area given in census report (2570 miles) and 691 on the area including sea river etc excluding reserve forests rivers etc density per sq mile is 943 The average density in each rural inhabited Mauza given in the census tables of 1931 is 1 651 per sq mile The figure excludes those areas of Khas leased forest and jungles in which there is scattered habitation It must be borne in mind that very large area of the total is uninhabitable in Chittagong

TABLE II

Percentage distribution of Hindus Muslims and others in 1931
(Compiled from census table)

Police Stations	*Muslims*		*Hindus*		*Others*	
	1931	1921	1931	1921	1931	1921
Chittagong	43 15	51 32	52 48	44 15	4 37	4 53
Boalkhali	59 46	57 06	37 18	39 14	3 36	3 80
Patiya	66 61	65 21	29 01	30 05	4 74	0 01
Fatikchari	73 40	72 69	22 17	23 41	4 09	3 90
Hathazari	79 22	78 79	18 75	19 46	2 03	1 75
Panchlaish	88 11	88 24	10 46	10 47	1 43	1 29
Doublemooring	77 42	78 43	21 43	20 95	1 15	0 62
Raojan	56 02	54 73	33 04	33 82	10 94+	11 45+
Rangunia	65 68	65 19	25 88	26 32	8 74+	8 50+
Anwara	70 00	69 08	28 80	29 73	1 20+	1 19+
Satkania	81 17	80 35	16 55	17 13	2 28+	2 52+
Banshkhali	79 83	78 06	18 53	20 16	1 64+	1 78+
Miesarai	69 92	69 46	28 30	29 02	1 58+	1 51+
Sitakund	75 76	74 72	23 35	24 74	0 89+	0 54+
Chittagong District	73 80	72 81	21 84	22 58	4 36°	4 61°

\+ Denotes overwhelming majority Buddhists

° Includes 4 20 and 4 51 per cent of Buddhists respectively and Christians 0 09 and 0 08 respectively for 1931 and 1921 in Chittagong district In Chittagong town the percentage was 2 92 and 2 78 in Doublemooring it was 0 46 and 0 42 respectively for 1931 and 1921

The census figures of any decade show the preponderance of Muslim population over the Hindus in Chittagong The tables (1) & (2) would reveal the fact that nowhere in the police stations marked (except in the Chittagong town) the Hindus were in majority where the Hindu Bhadralog youths were obtaining shelters

It is gloriously evident with such overwhelming majority of Muslims in the country side and the thickly populated villages the Hindu alone could not go very far without the help and sympathy of the Muslims

THE IMMORTAL SURYA SEN

ANANDA GUPTA

Great martyers like great historical personalities do not grow from nowhere They emerge under specific conditions under pressure of historical forces amidst which they are born and have grown The overwhelming fact of foreign enslavement and the colonial exploitation provided the objective background which gave meaning and direction to their lives

But these objective conditions were prevailing all over India—how come that of all the parts of India Bengal became the major venue of patriotic upsurge and martyrdom in such proportion? Bengal of all places was an abode of peaceloving and submissive people What magic transformed this land of docile people to a land of heroes? Bengali intelligentsia hitherto immersed in the quagmire of servility and inaction gave birth to death defying teenagers whose patriotic dedication and self sacrifice was second to none thanks to the inspiring leadership of Surya Sen and his lieutenants Without underrating the patriotic contribution of other parts of India it is no exaggeration to say that Bengal attained in those days a distinguished place in the political map of India

Long ago Socrates had said "an unexamined life is not worth living Stretching this dictum one step further it will not be out of place to say that an UNEXAMINED episode like Chittagong *Uprising and its leader Surya Sen is not worth writing about*

Hence this searching question What was at the root of this miracle? The truth is the mere existence of objective factors of colonial oppression were not enough Had it been so we would have witnessed similar instances of martyrdom all over the country This crucial question is all the more relevant in a vast country like India with cultural and linguistic heterogeneity Thanks to the emergence of the mighty and creative thought currents generated by the literature of Bankim D L Roy

Tagore, Sarat Chandra and Nazrul in terms of patriotism and human sensitivity, massive cloud formations filled the intellectual and political firmament of Bengal which was waiting for a precipitating agent to transform these clouds into a vast downpour The great Surya Sen and the likes of him provided the human embodiment of that crucial precipitating agent Indeed great historical personalities act as catalysts, give form and direction to the immense historical processes amidst which they find themselves Perhaps even Tagore and Sarat Chandra could hardly anticipate that their dream creations of Gora and Sabyasachi will find larger than life embodiment in Surya Sen and the dedicated band of heroes and heroines who illumin *ated the path of freedom struggle in those days Great thinkers* produce great thought currents which generate powerful seminal literature which in its turn produces exemplary personalities who sometimes overreach the literature that had helped to launch them on the historical scene As a matter of fact in Surya Sen Tagore's dream was more than fulfilled His dream hero Gora had to have IRISH BLOOD (to make his death defying patriotism and his explosive personality credible) as it was unthinkable perhaps even to Tagore that such human specimens could be at all possible with, least of all, BENGALI blood His immortal message of chastisement as expressed in his famous poem *Bengal Mother* (*Banga Mata*) is worth quoting

"Oh the enchanted mother

"You have nurtured your seven crore offspring as BENGALI but have failed alas, to make them manly'

Thus resounding message did not go unheeded, thanks to the martyrs like Surya Sen Tarakeswar Dastidar Nirmal Sen Naresh Roy, Bidhu Bhattacharya, Hargopal Baul (TEGRA), Tripura Sen, Nirmal Lala Sasanka Dutta, Madhusudan Dutta Pulin Bikash Ghosh, Jiten Das Gupta, Probhas Baul Motilal Kanungo Ardhendu Dastidar, Himangshu Sen Amarendra Nandi Swadesh Roy, Rajat Sen Debaprasad Gupta Manoranjan Sen Jiban Ghosal, Ramkrishna Biswas Nor should we forget the pioneering role of women revolutionaries such as Pritilata Waddedar (the first woman martyr), Kalpana Joshi, Bina Das, Santi and Suniti and other noble sisters of that epoch

There is a saying Cometh the hour cometh the man Fortunately for India the right man did come at the right time Through Tagore's mighty pen again came the thunderous call

These simple silent suffering souls must find their voice and these tired broken parched hearts must be enlivened by the breath of hope

Call them to stand united for a moment with heads erect, for indeed the craven oppressor is a greater coward than the oppressed on whose awakening the oppressors shall fly

Face your tyrants Like frightened curs they shall shrink and vanish

The gods are against them friendless they are and with all their vaunts and boasts they know their own wretched meanness

'Yours O Muse of Life is the task of awakening inspiring and emancipating this dismal world steeped as it is in darkness sorrow and pain in poverty emptiness and insignificance Nazrul's clarion call too shook Bengal at the right time thanks to martyrs like Surya Sen and other patriotic heroes The e rousing words of Tagore Nazrul and Sarat Chandra were translated into series of actions whatever might have been the limitations of those actions Chittagong Uprising opened the flood gates of patriotic upsurge throughout Bengal and elsewhere The names of many martyrs throughout the length and breadth of Bengal and elsewhere have not yet been adequately recorded in our history But the household names of martyrs like Benoy Badal and Dinesh and the martyrs related to the heroic acts of sacrifice such as Prodyut Mrigen Braja Ram Krishna and Nirmal are worth mentioning in a context like this It is interesting to note in this connection that in a recent BBC television serial under the heading Tales of India the then District Magistrate of Midnapore had this to say regarding the excellence of Prodyut's heroism when he met him in prison and asked him how he was Prodyut's reply was Thank you very much for giving me the chance to give my life for my country'

All these however should not make us forget our indebtedness to the pioneers of earlier patriotic struggles—beginning from Sanyasi Rebellion 'Sepoy Mutiny and martyrs like

Kshudiram Kanailal and a lot of successive martyrs including Bhagat Singh Rajguru Sukhdev and Jatin Das

Of particular significance in the process of our patriotic education were the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru, Sukhdev and Jatin Das whose examples were fresh in our memory The historic statement made by Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutta before the magistrate in 1929 was indeed inspiring and left an indelible impression in our young minds and excerpts from which are worth quoting

" the attack was not directed towards any individual but against an institution itself We are next to none in our love for humanity and as such far from having any malice against anyone humble claim to be no more than serious students of history and conditions of our country and human aspiration "

About "Utopian non-violence they said "The expression 'Utopian non violence' needed some explanation Force when aggressively applied is violence, and is therefore morally unjustifiable but when it is used in furtherance of a legitimate cause, it has its moral justification Elimination of force at all costs is Utopian and the new movement which has arisen in the country and of which we have given a warning is inspired by ideals which guided Guru Govind Singh and Shivaji Kemal Pasha and Reza Khan Washington and Garibaldi Lafayette and Lenin "

Thus the statement went on "Revolution is the inalienable right of mankind Freedom is the imperishable birthright of all The labour is the real sustainer of society Sovereignty of the people is the ultimate destiny of the workers For these ideals and for this faith we shall welcome any suffering to which we may be condemned To the altar of this revolution we have brought our youth as incense, for sacrifice is too great for so magnificent a cause We are content and we await the advent of Revolution 'Long Live Revolution' "

Soon after that came the glorious martyrdom of Jatin Das a co-accused of Bhagat Singh (Lahore conspiracy case) an event of great impetus in our young lives at that time His historic hunger strike for human living conditions for Political pri-

soners and eventual death shook the whole country I was then a boy of 14 having just been recruited into the secret party led by Surya Sen, but the unforgettable memories of those days are still alive The gruesome details of that epochal hunger strike as recalled by Ajoy Ghosh himself a hunger-striker in support of Jatin Das in his book (*Bhagat Singh and His Comrades*) is worth quoting "Determined to break us, the jail officials removed all water from our cells and placed milk instead in the pitcher This was the worst ordeal imaginable After a day, thirst grew unbearable I would drag myself to the pitcher, hoping everytime to find water but drew back at the sight of milk It was maddening If the man who had hit upon this device had been there before me I would have killed him The fateful moment in Jatin Das's epic hunger strike came on September 13, 1929 when he had completed the 63rd day of his fast The whole nation was shocked beyond words

The *Tribune* wrote on Jatin's death the following memorable words

'*If ever a man died hero and martyr to a noble cause that* man is Jatindra Nath Das and the blood of martyr has in all ages and countries been the seed of higher and nobler life better social and political order Wife of Terence McSwiney (who sacrificed his life under similar conditions in Ireland) sent the following wire 'Family Terence McSwiney unites Patriotic Indians in grief and pride of death of Jatindranath Das Freedom will come"

Our relationship with the then National Congress is worth mentioning in this context Though we were looked upon as *PERSONA NON GRATA* by the adherents of non-violence at any cost' school we were grateful to the radical wing of the Congress headed by no less a person than Subhas Chandra Bose whose manysid d help played a significant role in strengthening our organisation Let us also remind ourselves of the gratitude we owe him The legendary contribution of his elder brother Sarat Chandra Bose as the Chief Defence Council in support of the "Armoury Raid Case is a matter of history His thunderous defence of the young "ccused in that trial was really something worth hearing and seeing

Even Mahatma Gandhi despite his difference on the basic point of view with regard to non violence took upon himself the responsibility of our release when we gave up the historical Hunger Strike in the Andamans at his earnest request

While making no secret of his devotion to non violence he had thus to say to us when he met us at the Alipore Central Jail after our repatriation from the Andamans "I differ from you as *south pole differs from north pole* but if I had one dozen dedicated youths like you I could have changed the history of India long ago' Those historic words of Gandhiji are still ringing in my ears

Coming back to the background of the Chittagong Uprising of 1930 what were the circumstances at that time? Let me quote from my book *The Story of Chittagong Rebellion* published in Bengali in 1948

'18th April 1930—Good Friday—a special day for the Sahibs and the most auspicious day in our newly initiated revolutionary life and one of the most memorable days in the history of our Freedom struggle

'50 years ago this historical event in the eastern most city of *Chittagong overtook the whole country by surprise* The bewildered people of India heard that a band of youth had launched an armed rebellion against the established might of the English overlords Their lightning attack has immobilised all the centres of administration of Chittagong—all the armouries are in their hands *the whole city is in the hands of the insurgents* all railway lines have been uprooted , etc etc The news hit the headlines Is this a sort of reenactment of the famous Irish Easter rebellion on Indian soil? The news generated imaginary news The number of insurgents were imagined by some as 500, some even raised the figure to 1000 *The second round of surprise* overtook all concerned when the true figure of participants were revealed in the course of the Chittagong Armoury Raid Trial Far from 1000 or even 500, the real number of participants were only 65 and out of those about 70 per cent were teenagers

"A strange feeling overwhelms you when you recall the dark days of 50 years ago In those days one needed real courage to utter words like rebellion or revolution Many would

experience the shock of seeing a ghost if the word "Armed rebellion was uttered in their presence An all embracing fear enchained the people Sense of 'self respect and of 'inalienable human right or urge for a 'free unfettered country sounded incredible like bookish jargon

"We were born amidst such a weak, anaemic and paralysed society We were endowed with all the 'do s' and 'don ts as our inheritance of that sick and servile society

"But the spirit of the new epoch and new thought provoking ideas generated mobility into our immobilised minds The subconscious urge for freedom and strength searched avenues of self expression and self confidence Our excited mind started to rediscover the realities around us The indignity of enslavement stirred our minds as never before The adjective Timid Bengali became unendurable like a cursed disease We all remember how at that stage we found food for thought in the robust voices of Tagore and Nazrul It was the much-needed voice of dignity patriotism and human justice Our surcharged mind was hungry for a new identity—an identity which is free from the curse of age old cowardice which refuses to submit to the humiliation of servile existence"

I still remember the day when I had the first privilage of meeting the immortal Surya Sen One day I was told by the Late Ananta Singh "You are going to meet to morrow the leader of our party on your way back from school His name is Surya Sen We all call him Master Da' '

I still remember I could not help being worried Would he consider me suitable enough to be a member of the party? What would he think of me and my capabilities? etc etc

Next day I arrived at Ananta Singh's home at the appointed time I looked around with keen enthusiasm I found a very ordinary looking man seated in a corner most of his head bald I thought perhaps 'Master D i' (Surya Sen) was yet to arrive I looked at once at Ananta Singh He immediately introduced me "This is Master Da about whom I have told you already' and he left the room leaving me alone with Surya Sen A stream of thoughts crossed my mind Is this the famous man who leads the party and whose word is law to his followers? But contrary to my preconceived notion he looked very ordinary I moved

nearer and sat close to him But no sooner had I looked at his eyes than I felt rather uncomfortable I immediately had the feel of a powerful (but unassuming) personality behind his piercing pair of eyes None the less, his lifestyle was truly sub ordinary so much so that excepting a select few his powerful existence was hardly known to the public at all Certain drama tic qualities which often become an essential part of leaders of a certain species was certainly lacking in him He was never seen in any public meeting in the role of an oratorical rabble rouser He was always in the background What then was at the root of the magic of his influence and leadership ? There was a transparent sincerity in him which attracted the spontaneous respect of his followers He used to hate all sorts of artificiality and most of all the air of superior mystique which is often con sidered by leaders of lesser breed as an essential tool of the trade The cheap art of self inflation was thoroughly incom patible with his mental constitution He had the modesty which stems from real strength and confidence and encouraged his followers to be unsparing in their criticism if they found any thing disagreeable in him He ended the interview with the fol lowing memorable words Ours is not an easy life Our primary emphasis is on quality The role of maximum sacrifice and dedication must not be underrated You need not rush in decid ing whether you want to join us or not If after serious self searching there is the least hesitation it is far better to part company there will be no ill feeling on our part It is not our aim to swell our numbers by indiscriminate recruiting The party must be as strong as the challanges facing us The fight for freedom is going to be a long and very exacting struggle There is only one way A dedicated band of youths must show the path of organised armed struggle in place of individual terror ism Most of us will have to die in the process but our sacrifice for such a noble cause will not go in vain Whoever will dream of a push button revolution which will change our country one day by countrywide concerted action—in a vast country like ours with varied culture and languages is a worthless dreamer "

Thanks to the inspiration and meticulous organisational skill of Surya Sen and his lieutenants Chittagong witnessed the forma tion of what can truly be called the IRON BRIGADE of dedi-

cated patriots It was indeed a unique organisation which almost assumed the role of a parallel authority and there were innumerable instances where notorious hooligans were not only punished almost with severity but the leading goondas were even put on trial in our SWADESHI Court The patriotic army of Surya Sen earned the gratitude of the victimised public and struck terror into the underworld gangs of goondas and thugs

To counteract the police intelligence a Counter intelligence was organised successfully, which made the local police authorities very worried indeed Besides, the zero hour was fast approaching and the hectic activities of this fire brand Swedeshi youths made the police authorities seriously worried Let me quote the dramatic notice of warning by the Superintendent of Police J R Johnson

'Confidential—

Mobilisation of all forces to combat the present movement

'I want all offices to realise that the present political agitation is fast becoming of a nature where secret organisations are gaining a considerable following In fact the position in Chittagong has reached the stage where the District Intelligence Branch staff however it might be augmented are unable to cope with the activities of certain secret organisations

'There is evidence on record that the secret agitation has been extended throughout the District From a total lack of information received from the uniformed branch of the force I am compelled to have come to the conclusion that the opinion widely exists that this branch of the force appear to hold that to discover or check the secret organisations is not within their duties

"I wish to state most explicitly that this is a totally wrong idea and should say that should this idea be allowed to continue there will come a time when even the constable will find himself the recipient of most horrible awakening at the hands of some misguided youths of the party in the shape of an outrage

'It is up to all ranks down to constable to have his eyes and ears open and to know who are the persons concerned in this agitation They should make it their duty to be able to know them by sight, know their homes, haunts, and associates so that when occasion arises they can identify them and report their movement

"As far as the town of Chittagong is concerned all ranks of the uniformed force should immediately be helped to get to know the leading political suspects and the specially active persons This will be done by all officers, obtaining their names from Dy S P officers and with them arrange to get to know these persons, appearances, their present homes and homes of those with whom they are seen to associate After this all constables and head constables will be made to get to know them and the instruction will be given to constables on beat patrol and the traffic duty to invariably note the time, direction they take should they pass their posts These reports will be handed over to D S P Special notes should be made of the facts if they are seen meeting in any particular place, passing the particular road loitering or examining any particular place Their movements and meetings or those of strangers should be particularly watched If they are found meeting any person and after conversation, separate names of the persons met with should be ascertained In this way much useful information will be collected The names of constables who put in particular intelligent report will be recorded and useful information attained will be rewarded Plain clothes work amongst constables of a purely volunteer nature will be specially recognised

"The D I B will supply the names of known organisers and the local police officer should interest their constables to work in the same lines as the town police

"In conclusion I wish to inform all officers and men that in their own interest and safety they should use their eyes and ears and supply all informations that they possibly can obtain so that in the event of any outbreak of any terrorist activity all ranks will be prepared to help in taking immediate action

"To have a complete list of the suspects marked and to have all their homes and haunts marked down will prove of great advantage in the case of round-up I trust therefore that in their own safety all ranks of uniformed branch will in future look upon the detection of political activities as one of their most important duty Good and intelligent work will be noticed and when possible rewarded

J R Johnson
S P 10/2/30"

Many a time we have been asked how you could hope to liberate our country by such a small group whose range of performance was so limited To them I can only repeat what Surya Sen used to quote Those were the historical words of the famous Irish Patriot Lalor

"Somehow, somewhere and by somebody a beginning must be made and the first act of resistance is always and shall ever be premature imprudent unwise and dangerous"

MASTERDA IN THE EYES OF HIS REVOLUTIONARY ASSOCIATES

NEMAI SADHAN BOSE

It is not easy to explain rationally the origin of a legend Very often a genius, a superman, a man of extraordinary capabilities or attributes becomes a legend after his death The history of every country has legendary figures and India has more than her share of such names throughout her long and eventful history But how could a most ordinary-looking, apparently innocuous, simple unpretentious school teacher grow into a legend in his own life time? What could make him a national hero? How did he come to be defied in his own area, among his own people, and eventually grow into the symbol of a nation's urge for freedom and resolve to make the supreme sacrifice for the motherland? Surya Sen more endearingly known as Masterda, typifies such an uncommon man His mesmerism continues to baffle students of history today as it did his closest friends and followers more than half a century ago. Here was a man who was apparently so ordinary almost common-place, yet in actual life a colossus who occupies a unique position in the history of the Indian freedom movement

Surya Sen's close associates frankly admit that he did not fit in with their image of a revolutionary Ananta Singh was a little disappointed in his first interview with Masterda who till then, had done little that was daring He saw in his future revolutionary *guru* no restlessness, but only placidity, calmness and a hidden depth

Thus was in 1918, more than a decade before the historic Chittagong uprising The personality of Masterda apparently underwent little outward changes in the subsequent years A hardened uncompromising fearless revolutionary, he was essentially a soft-spoken kind-hearted man His love and concern

for his young revolutionary comrades were no less than that of their parents His associates could feel that affection though there was very little outward manifestation of that tenderness Yet his boys knew that their leader would risk his own precious life without a moment's hesitation to save their lives Once surrounded by a herd of threatening rampaging elephants in Karaldanga hills, Masterda took grave risk to escort his young accompanying colleague to safety The same Masterda of motherly instinct offered his hand of safety to convalescent Tarakeswar Dastidar while swimming across the river Karnaphuli to evade a chasing police force

Masterda could relax in the middle of a crisis or while living dangerously in revolutionary hideouts He indulged in humour and even played cards He insisted on looking after himself He cooked his own food, washed the dishes and his own clothes A shy man of quiet disposition, he had an aversion to self-projection and strongly resented any publicity given to him by his revolutionary comrades whose adoration for their leader was unbounded This was also true of numerous people of all classes and sections Hindus and Muslims, whose doors were kept open for the great revolutionary leader and his men, risking their own lives honour and property and contemptuously ignoring lucrative offers of reward from the police for supplying information On his part, Surya Sen had great concern for the safety and convenience of his hosts and issued strict instructions to his men to ensure that they should do nothing that might cause inconvenience to the homes that had offered them shelter

What made Surya Sen an idolised leader? What were his special attributes that commanded such respect and loyalty? The answers to these questions are to be found in the memoirs and accounts of the men who worked under his leadership Masterda always gave opportunity to his young colleagues to bring out their best It was his sincerity that attracted others like a magnet He was free from vanity and egotism He never thought that he himself was above criticism He used to tell his men that they should not do anything, obey any order even if they came from him unless they could accept these from their heart He never imposed any decision on his comrades He patiently and carefully listened to others, respected others' view-

points and then tried to win by arguing rationally In return he earned the love, respect and confidence of his men He advised his young revolutionary followers never to insult or hurt unnecessarily the feelings of their seniors He emphasised that disagreement or differences should never prompt anyone to insult his opponents He was far above pettiness and petty squabbles Masterda had a piercing, almost glowing pair of eyes that probed and scanned the inner depths of anyone who came to see him One of his young followers had written that his entire personality and revolutionary fire seemed to have concentrated in his two eyes His eyes were captivating and made him a shrewd judge of human character

But even more captivating were his leadership qualities and his capacity to rise to the occasion in critical situations He never kept himself away from revolutionary actions and encounters His men knew that their leader was always with them, by their side, keeping a careful watch on them and deeply concerned about their safety, and success of the mission He was a great strategist very particular in working out the details of any planned action He was very careful and enjoined on his men to exercise the utmost caution in their movements and actions This he considered essential to the success of any mission Narrating a personal experience, he wrote in his incomplete autobiography (which unfortunately has been lost) that when the police apprehended him in Calcutta on October 8 1926, they found nothing incriminating in his possession He wrote "I am always very careful I always wanted to make sure that the police did not come to know of the secret of our organisation due to carelessness Previously I used to be even more careful These days I have tended to become a little careless because my comrades are not always very careful Carelessness has become contagious and has somewhat affected me as well Men tend to become a little impatient by being careful all the time They seek relief in carelessness Thus, though I have always been careful of late I, too, have become a little careless But I am still far more careful than my comrades And because I am so careful the police have not received any documents about our revolutionary organization in Chittagong which will cause much harm There has not yet been any serious loss due

to my carelessness If any serious damage has been caused that has not been due to my mistake It has been due to the carelessness of my comrades In these lines one finds Masterda speaking like an experienced commander underlining the supreme importance of caution and carefulness in word and deed for a successful operation

The great fighting qualities of Surya Sen were displayed in the Jalalabad encounter with the vastly superior and numerically stronger armed forces of the British administration The personal courage and heroism displayed during these eventful days the deep concern shown for his own forces for every individual revolutionary and the subsequent recourse to guerilla war marking the beginning of the second phase of the Chittagong armed uprising brought out the leadership qualities of Surya Sen at their glorious best A legend that had been in the making was finally born

Surya Sen considered kindness compassion and humane qualities as essential virtues of a true revolutionary Before the revolutionary struggle was launched on the historic April 18 1930 he asked the revolutionaries not to seek revenge on Indian Police or Intelligence Department men unless they stood in the way of a successful operation or unless it was necessitated by self defence He endorsed the decision of Lokenath Baul to spare the lives of the wife and children of Sergeant Major Ferrel who had been killed in an encounter with the revolutionaries Masterda told Lokenath that it would have been quite natural if they had been killed in view of the horrible memories of the atrocities committed by the British Government on unarmed innocent women and children in Jalianwallabagh Yet you have set a noble example by responding to the appeal for mercy from a woman Humanism is a special virtue of a revolutionary By sparing her life you had upheld that noble virtue

The policy and method by which Surya Sen gradually made the preparations for the Chittagong uprising bear testimony to his political wisdom tact organizational ability and foresight He was from his early youth a committed revolutionary who had little faith in the Congress policy of constitutional agitations His hatred for and impatience with British imperialism

in India were too intense to be satisfied by the Congress programme Gandhiji's philosophy and technique of non violence had little appeal to him Yet, he chose to work within the Indian National Congress for he realised that it was the only organization that had been developing a mass base under Gandhiji's leadership It was through the Congress movement that he could more easily reach the people and recruit fearless spirited young men for the ultimate-uprising which he had in mind The massacre and tragedy of Jalianwallabagh kindled the flames of revolutionary fire that were burning in him The trials and errors of the non cooperation movement made him better equipped to provide leadership The vigilance of the police the experience in Ratnagiri Jail in Bombay made him a more seasoned revolutionary and a maturer politician The political events of the late 1920s the growing impatience of the young radicals in the Congress the gathering clouds and thunders of the imminent Civil Disobedience Movement convinced Surya Sen that the time for the final action had come It was as if an inner voice an irresistible impulse prompted Surya Sen to take a course of action that would provide an ideal an inspiration a shining example to the people in their struggle for independence against the British imperialists Surya Sen knew that what he was trying to achieve was impossible There was little possibility of overthrowing the British rule in India as a result of a localised uprising in Chittagong Yet, the uprising had to take place In the view of its chief architect and builder Surya Sen, and of his band of fearless revolutionary comrades, the uprising was to be a symbol of all Indians aspiration for independence Through this action, the revolutionary movement in India was to reach a new milestone and take a new dimension Hitherto it had generally taken the form of terrorist activities and individual assassination of notorious officials and judges But henceforth it was to transcend the rather limited objectives and barriers of terrorism It was to open a new front in the battle against the might of British imperialism The Chittagong uprising was to serve a warning to the British rulers and, at the same time inculcate the spirit of self-confidence fearlessness and sacrifice among patriotic Indians all over the country

The Chittagong uprising was memorable for another reason

It reflected a new attitude towards the participation of women in revolutionary actions This was the first time that young women such as Pritilata Waddedar and Kalpana Datta took part in the armed encounters in Chittagong, while many others, like Bina Das, were being converted to the 'cult' of the bomb and revolver in other parts of the country On 24 September, 1932, in a revolutionary hideout, Pritilata told Masterda, on the eve of the attack on the Pahartali European Club, that she had been waiting for this auspicious moment all through her life She sought the blessings of Masterda and expressed her deep sense of gratitude to him for moulding her life as a revolutionary But then she asked, "Masterda, I intend to serve as an obedient worker Why are you thrusting leadership on me?" In a firm but emotional voice Masterda told Pritilata that the time had come to open a new chapter on the valour, strength and sacrifice of the women in India's struggle for freedom "Your success or failure will be the beginning of that chapter Let the English know let the world see that the women of this country are no longer lagging behind" Pritilata sacrificed her life and indeed a new chapter was opened Masterda's dream came true

Masterda never wanted leadership On many an occasion he asked his close trusted comrades to take command But he was a born-leader of men to whom people always looked for leadership and guidance Whenever asked about himself he replied in all seriousness and humility, "They (his fellow revolutionaries) have made me great." Asked about the legends that had grown around his name, he used to reply, "All the stories are not true Many are exaggerated But the people of my country love me and that is why they do not want that I should be caught by the police Hence they have invested me with supernatural power which is only an expression of their own desire" The explanation was only half true But it brought out a man who deeply loved his people and whose love was more than reciprocated by a grateful people

Masterda was a fiery patriot, an uncompromising revolutionary with a glowing penetrating pair of eyes One could at times see flames in those eyes Iron determination was writ large on his broad forehead Yet, those eyes often shed tears over the

fallen body of young comrades Anguish and sadness could be seen in him while losing any comrades in encounters But such tears and anguish only made him more determined to continue relentlessly the heroic battle for independence

Surya Sen took keen interest in the political movement in Burma and the struggle of the Irish people Dan Breen was one of his favourite heroes He often read Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* with his young comrades He respected Lenin and admired his simple life and his selfless service to his people Masterda was a believer in democracy and individual rights He was anxious to know about the activities of Rashbehari Bose, Raja Mahendrapratap and the Pan Asian Movement that had started in Japan He often recited poems of Rabindranath Tagore He was very proud of Tagore whom he respected as a priceless national asset He told Niranjan Sengupta that love for poetry would not make him a non revolutionary and that songs and poems of Tagore were in the life veins of Bengali revolutionaries Kazi Nazrul Islam was also one of his favourite poets He himself was a good writer He wrote a few articles He began to write his autobiography which unfortunately was seized by the police and got lost or destroyed.

Chittagong was described by the Intelligence Department in 1934 as "the mainland of Bengal revolutionary activities The master mind behind all these was Masterda who was a terror to the entire district administration, the police and the armed forces A master of disguises he was an elusive figure about whose character and personality even the police had no clear notion But they were certain about one thing Surya Sen was an inveterate enemy of the British and so long as he was alive they would not get a respite To them he was a dangerous terrorist who in his own words had sworn to avenge "a single drop of blood with a deluge of blood shed in return'

Surya Sen was a man who believed in armed revolution and was convinced that his martyrdom was a divine dispensation While death was knocking at his door his mind was 'soaring towards eternity" He had the rare vision and insight to see and realise that the believers in non violence and violence, were both fighting for the independence of India They all dreamt of freedom They were on the same pilgrimage, only following

their own chosen paths His last appeal to all freedom fighters before he mounted the gallows, was to march onward and to maintain unity in the revolutionary organizations He was a lunatic who passionately and unturningly pursued the golden dream of Free India A bonded nation seldom produces such lunatics But when it does the period of bondage cannot continue for long Masterda courted a painful death with courage, conviction and a smile To him the approach of death was a pleasant moment the time for *sadhana* It was this death defying Masterda who won and dominated the hearts of his comrades in arms and thousands of his countrymen They included his adversaries such as the police officer of Patia thana who whispered to a brutally battered Masterda Surya Babu we have many things to learn from you He was a true teacher in every sense of the term The memory of the fights in Jalalabad Juldia Chandannagar and Dhalghat as also his own hallowed memory continued to inspire freedom fighters everywhere in India The heroic resistance and the guerilla war of the Bangladesh freedom fighters drew much inspiration from the name of Surya Sen and the saga of the Chittagong uprising Surya Sen died to live for ever and create a legend that is proudly enshrined in the hearts of his grateful countrymen *

* The article is primarily based on the memoirs and reminiscences of revolutionaries who knew Masterda and fought under his leadership

CHITTAGONG REVOLUTIONARIES AND BRITISH OFFICIALS

TANIKA SARKAR

In his study of Bengali terrorists D M Lanshey has written 'Bengali writers invariably tend to exaggerate the fear and cowardice of British officials in India' His assessment is that even though fear of revolutionary terrorism was an undoubted fact, it was nothing like what is usually claimed by nationalist minded Indians[1] Even a cursory glance, however, at contemporary Home Department records and private papers of Englishmen in Bengal particularly after Chittagong Armoury Raid reveals that, on the contrary, the extent of terrorist impact on official and white morale has probably never been fully assessed so far

From 1927 28 onwards the Bengal Governor Jackson had followed a policy of gradual release of terrorist prisoners and detenus as after 1924-25 there had been no major outbreak or incident The revolutionaries had spent this time in recovering from the earlier blow of government repression and in reorganising their own forces and preparing for future action In 1930 soon after the Civil Disobedience movement had been launched, the final chapter in the saga of revolutionary terrorism began with a tremendous bang The curtain raiser itself was the dramatic Chittagong Armoury Raid of April 18 by the Chittagong branch of the Indian Republican Army This was followed in rapid succession by other major episodes the August 25 bomb incident at Dalhousie Square by the Calcutta Jugantar, the assassination of Lowman at Dacca by members of the Bengal Vol unteers and a B V raid on the Writers' Building in Calcutta on December 8 In the course of that one year 11 English officials and 10 non officials were killed 12 British officials and 14 non-officials injured and 450 terrorists held under preventive detention" The shock of these continuous, startling outbursts was all the more traumatic for the Bengal Government which lulled by a false sense of security in the preceding years of seeming in-

action had deliberately been relaxing vigilance This sense of shock and of being taken completely unawares accounted for a massive and multipronged man hunt that subsequently engaged the largest part of the Government's attention

The very nature of the Armoury Raid accounts for the great panic Something of a departure from the usual pattern of attacks on individual Whites it involved a big group of men (over 60 in all) in action which was planned in minute detail and perfected over a long time A whole organisation was carefully and patiently developed for the ultimate purpose of simultaneous attacks on the Police Lines the Telegraph Office and the Auxiliary Force Headquarters so that the town authorities could be temporarily immobilised and the attackers could make away with a good supply of arms[3] They proposed to take by surprise the District Police and capture the District Treasury and Armoury even if they sustain the attack for an hour and then die fighting they consider it will have a tremendous moral effect"[4] Despite the limited aim of upholding an example by action if on a dramatic scale the long and detailed planning organisation and near perfect coordination made it an "amazing coup", and, even British officers could not withhold a grudging tribute to the remarkable efficiency of the revolutionaries Government of India representatives crossly commented that "they (the GOI) find it difficult to understand how the insurgents were able to plan and execute a raid of this magnitude without arousing the previous suspicions of the authorities[5] The rising was distinguished not only by remarkable planning but also by a prolonged sequel of surprising resistance—the guerilla warfare after leaving the Jalalabad Hills escape from the highly alert vigilance of the district authorities and the development of a fantastic underground apparatus all over Bengal

Fears aroused by the Chittagong events would not die down In terms of actual attacks 1931 was quieter than both 1930 and 1932 Major assassinations however were *nicely* spaced out to maintain a high level of suspense[6] On top of that there was the running sore of abortive attempts minor attacks and a steady stream of dacoities which seemed to indicate preparations for more largescale operations The Government retaliated with the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act in October to suppress subversive publications the Ordinance IX (also in October) giving

the Government wide powers of preventive detention and the Bengal Emergency Powers Ordinance in November which gave officials a virtually free hand in dealing with the revolutionaries[7] Jackson wrote to Secretary of State Hoare in August that 500 terrorist suspects were already detained and further repressive measures were necessary to detain at least another 500 even though the whole venture was proving extremely expensive[8] During 1931 32 alone, Rs 21,50,000 were spent on multi pronged counter terrorist efforts by the Government[9] Still, far from being an effective deterrent, detention camps proved to be centres for further planning and preparation[10]

In December, Prentice, Home Member to the Government of Bengal, confessed that 'terrorists had taken a serious toll of the Services and reduced considerably the number of officials available for dealing with it' He did not refer here only to those killed and wounded but also to those whose nerves could no longer take the strain and suspense Donovan, the Barisal District Officer, thought it prudent to go on leave and Baker the Governor of Hijli jail at the time of the Hijli shootings, escaped to Calcutta All White officials in affected areas began to ask for armed guard and— We shall have to provide more if the menace grows the strain is telling on the Services wrote Prentice He talked of an English judge who had told him that if he was put on the tribunal to try the Peddie assassination case, he would immediately leave the country, with or without leave[11] Young Europeans in Calcutta were convinced that the battery of repressive measures was most inadequate and sought to put pressure on Jackson to intensify repression They formed a group called Royalists and 'there were dark rumours of a plot to repeat the events of the Ilbert Bill days and kidnapping him (the Governor)'[12]

In Chittagong however the massive increase of armed forces and security arrangements neither yielded information about the absconders nor stopped the smuggling of arms across the Burma border As an official admitted—'the authority of the Government has ceased to function in Chittagong'[13] The growing sense of helplessness burst out in sheer hysteria when European and police officers went berserk in Chittagong town in September 1931 Two other new features that came to characterise the revolutionary movement at this time added to the universal panic

With the assassination of the Comilla District Magistrate Stevens in December 1931 by two teenaged girl students, women for the first time engaged in direct assassination attempts They had already participated on more or less equal footing with men in the Gandhian Civil Disobedience and had helped terrorists in various ways before but the injunction of non-violence in that case did not make it into such a glaring transgression of their conventional role[9] The other and perhaps more serious threat came from the fact that Chittagong villages had now become the main hiding place for Surya Sen and his associates which, as we shall see later, led to some cultivation of local rural links almost for the first time Absconders and detenus interned in isolated villages were forced on an exclusively rural milieu in which they gradually developed their links and where they tried to spread their ideas[10] Occasionally some terrorist youths would undertake trips to tribal and poor peasant regions to widen the basis of support indicating a departure from the confines of purely individual terror[11] The threat involved in such a widening of horizon and scope of action seemed to deepen when an Intelligence Bureau Report found out that around 1931 "there was a remarkable manifestation of Communist spirit among all classes of terrorists in Bengal "[12] Even though on the whole this development was yet to be reflected at the level of action which continued to follow the well worn paths even the remote possibility of the combining of the two worst spectres was enough to haunt the British Raj

These developments provided the context to the so called communal riot in Chittagong town in August 1931 On August 30 Asanullah a police official notorious for his brutality against terrorists was assassinated in Chittagong town by a young boy That very evening some senior police officers called a Muslim meeting on the Kotwali (police station) grounds A Muslim eyewitness recorded that "two Muslim police officers delivered violently anti-Hindu and instigatory speeches to stir up a Muslim crowd "[13] That night a campaign of terror was unleashed against all Hindus with a nationalist reputation in Chittagong Pleaders defending the Armoury Raid convicts and other nationalists and men working in the printing press of the local nationalist paper *Panchajanya* were especially victimised Although a Muslim crowd had been deliberately incited by the local police to give

the episode the colour of a communal violence, Europeans and officials took too direct and leading a part in the actual attacks to let the myth take root Hirendralal Chowdhury, who was in charge of the press and was very badly assaulted that night, identified Baker, the Signalling Engineer in the Assam Bengal Railways as his main assailant Baker also personally directed the systematic smashing up of the press machinery All political suspects were rounded up in a midnight raid and mercilessly beaten up in the presence of Shooter the European Assistant Superintendent of Police A number of White officials and men prominent in town affairs were also present there An old man the father of a suspect later died from the injuries that were inflicted on him Europeans assisted by armed Gurkha bands, badly assaulted a woman

Rioting lasted till September 2 Maulvi Ashrafuddin later testified in front of a non official Enquiry Committee that there had certainly been direct official and police instigation Nur Ahmad, the Chairman of the Municipality, described how the District Magistrate and European Sergeants refused all help to Hindu victims and egged on the rioters at every stage Some amount of looting of shops by local Muslims inevitably ensued but attacks on persons were almost exclusively the work of Europeans Several raids were carried out in the surrounding villages but remarkably enough not a single Muslim villager joined in In Chittagong town joint peace committees were immediately set up and 'well placed and influential' Muslims gave shelter and every assistance [17]

Curiously enough official investigations almost entirely bore out the nationalist allegations The report admitted that sixteen to eighteen European Special Constables went to the *Panchajanya* Press building to "ensure that it ceased to function as a press' Whoever was found on the premises was beaten up and press furniture and machinery were smashed by hammers brought from the Railway Store The District Magistrate Kemm admitted that he knew of the raid but did nothing to prevent it The report frankly states—"The truth is that in breaking up the press they were neither Auxiliary Force nor special constables but an unlawful assembly' The report also describes how youths were rounded up and brought to the *thana* that night 'It is not de

ried that they were rounded up and beaten under the orders of the Superintendent of Police'.[8]

The picture of the origin of the riot is thus clear. Muslim Police officials first tried to make communal capital out of the terrorist assassination by addressing a Muslim crowd with inflammatory speeches. But before a communal riot could be organised, European and police officials themselves went on the rampage under cover of night. According to the official report the next morning, the whole police force were preoccupied with (Asanullah's) funeral arrangement" and therefore rioters could go *into action with a free hand*. *The funeral took place within the* town and it sounds passing strange that the police needed three hours to travel the riot-hit areas.[9]

Up to the morning of August 31, therefore, the so called communal rioting was entirely a police and European effort to incite the Muslims. After August 31 the police virtually left the scene, its good work done, and the city poor moved in to snatch at Hindu property from which official protection had been explicitly withdrawn. Hindu goldsmiths, moneylenders and cloth merchants bore the biggest losses but no report mentions violence of any other kind like rape or murder."[10] The communal venom that the officials tried to spread seemed to have found no basis other than in the looting instincts of depressed classes.

Even the official report concluded with a strong and open criticism of the local authorities and the Government decided not to publish it. The situation however had been so disgraceful that it had to record severe censure against various officials. "It was also decided to issue a general warning to all magistrates and police officers that such excesses must cease." The excesses were recognised but the Government then decided to condone and forgive all. Government took into account the special circumstances at Chittagong. Faced by dangerous and elusive gangs of murderers the officers had at a moment of extreme exasperation taken the law into their own hands and committed excesses for which the menace of terrorism furnished strong extenuation. In a case like this the officers were tried beyond *endurance*".[11]

Torture and terror had to become respectable again by assuming a legal, systematic character. To achieve this the Bengal

Government armed itself with 20 separate Acts and employed 7 Government Departments to carry out the anti terrorist mission— Political and Judicial Jail Finance Revenue Education and Local Self Government Additional expenditure on terrorism alone rose to Rs 21 50 000 in 1932 33 In 1933 34 it further went up to Rs 53 75 000 Imposition of punitive police and collective fines on disturbed areas were used both as warning and punishment. Chittagong town and seven adjoining villages were bound down to pay collective tax[23] Not satisfied with these expedients the English business magnate Benthall advocated more long standing measures like permanent anti terrorist legislation enormous improvements in the CID and IB Departments as well as dire punishments for families and localities harbouring terrorists It was all very well commented Hallet mournfully but he wondered whether all this would have very much impact on men for whom even death had ceased to be a deterrent Much thought was given instead to refined methods of counter propaganda The Government considered setting up a Publicity Board with officials and prominent non officials for anti terrorist work to publish articles to counteract seditious literature and to organise public lectures and meetings to justify Government action Among prospective non official members names of B M Sen (Principal Presidency College) J N Sarkar (Vice Chancellor Calcutta University and a prominent historian) were suggested[24] The Boy Scout institution was encouraged to catch schoolboys young before they could take the wrong path Army officers suggested another expedient in 1932 to absorb dangerous energies of school boys organised games and competitive activities in school on the house system[25]

Chittagong right up to the arrest and death of Surya Sen defied all repression valiantly Not only was urban Hindu middle class support fully retained in the teeth of the most severe strain but support came from areas and sections which had little to do with the revolutionaries elsewhere The absconders had their base in the village around Dhalghat and Patiya which were rigorously searched and punished but which stubbornly refused to yield them up The villages within half a dozen miles of Dhalghat are the centre of revolutionary organisation It was through the active support of the inhabitants of these villages that Surya Sen and his party were able to make their

plans,' wrote an official [5] In March 1933 villagers were promised remission from fines in exchange for information about the revolutionaries but this failed to produce any results at all [6]

When Tarakeswar Dastidar escaped into Bidgram in March 1933 with a police party at his heels, villagers were hauled up before officials and given all kinds of dire warnings but in vain The reason was that, wrote an official in despair, the majority of these villages were disloyal, had for the last 2 years actively supported and admired Surya Sen It was in the villages of this area in the previous 3 years that *Jugantar assassins* were trained, from these villages they set out to commit murders and to these villages that they returned to shelters which were safe only because they had the wholehearted sympathy of the villagers It was only in June 1933, a few months after Surya Sen's capture, that this stupendous morale began to crumble at last [7]

In Chittagong villages, where revolutionaries had never intentionally gone in for mass contact both on account of secrecy and on account of their limited perspective they could nevertheless exist like fish in water Here they were thrown upon the goodwill and courage not only of their familiar milieu but also of men and women with whom they had very little links but who still rose magnificently to the occasion In any emergency therefore unexpected sustenance flowed in vividly showing how easily latent anti-imperialist instincts could be brought to work even among people who had not been consciously prepared for it

These widening circles of support at mass level predictably led to panic and hysteria among the White community, every member of which thought of himself as a potential target "It is no exaggeration,' wrote Benthall, to say that the lives of prominent Europeans are in constant danger the Executive faces continual attacks witnesses are afraid to give evidence inhabitants in certain districts are forced to harbour criminals "[8] O M Martin the Rajshahi District Magistrate in 1932 went around everywhere with armed escort and was in great fear of women revolutionaries whom he considered deadlier than the male [9] Donovan, the Barisal District Magistrate left his post and the country in a hurry Although a pretext was trumped

up for the administrative personnel to sake face it is perfect ly clear, wrote Governor Anderson, that he had lost his nerve and was becoming hysterical [33] Mrs Taylor wife of the Inspector General Bengal police wrote from Mymensingh as late as November 1933— We have come back to a state of siege—we are again prisoners in the constant care of armed guard '"[4] In Chittagong naturally panic was at its height a force of a several thousand policemen had to be further stiffened by regular troops and a Royal Navy flagship came up to the harbour to raise the morale of British officers [35]

Surya Sen was arrested in February 1933 and was executed in January 1934 His martyrdom indicated the end of the era of classic revolutionary terrorism The decline of this creed, however, did not simply mean the end of a romantic dream, the loss of a heroic example by action That was a necessary stage in our relentless struggle for freedom from foreign rule

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Part II

Peasant and Tribal Uprisings

(From 1765 onwards)

PEASANT AND ADIVASI UPRISINGS (1765 1885)

NARAHARI KAVIRAJ

The earlier period of British colonial rule (1765 1885) was marked by a series of peasant uprisings, spreading over the whole of the Indian sub continent This was due to the fact that of all the classes in society the peasants suffered most from the imposition of an alien rule Under the Company's rule there was a reversal in the position of the raiyat in the status that he enjoyed as a useful member of the society There is a definite reference in the *Ain-i-Akbari* to the existence of peasant holdings' It was a general maxim with the Mughal Government that the immediate cultivator of the soil, duly paying his share of the revenue, should not be dispossessed of the land he occupied It follows that the peasants enjoyed occupancy rights which were inviolable He could not be ejected from the land as long as he paid the revenue[1]

The British Government had recourse to a number of land revenue experiments which produced an unprecedented agrarian crisis that engulfed the whole country The zamindari and the ryotwari settlements were both novel experiments that worked havoc upon the raiyats As Marx observes both were made not for the people who cultivate the soil nor for the holder, who owns it but for the Government that taxes it The Permanent Settlement was nothing short of the confiscation of raiyat lands in favour of the zamindars'[2] By a stroke of the pen Bengal zamindars who had been collectors of revenue were turned into hereditary owners In Madras and Bombay where the ryotwari system prevailed, the socalled peasant proprietor, Marx says, was both a serf and a metayer of the state He is subject to the extortion of the private usurer, but he has no hereditary, no permanent title in his land' Summing up the results, Marx concludes—in Bengal as in Madras and Bombay under the zamindari as under the ryotwari, the raiyats who form 11/12ths of the whole Indian population have been wretchedly pauper-

ised To this may be added the inroads made by the Company's Government upon the village community of the tribals (the Santhals Kols Khasias etc) A very strong indignation was generated by the general agrarian policy of the Government which resulted in the gradual disintegration of the tribal village community

Thus the whole revenue system was thrown out of gear There was a wholesale destruction of the national tradition Marx observes England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu' [6]

The traditional social structure based on the unity of agriculture and handicraft crumbled down Under the impact of the change the raiyats were not the only ones who suffered Owing to the decline of the handicraft industry, thousands of weavers and spinners were thrown out of employment The change also led to the impoverishment of the old zamindars The *mollahs* and their religious orders were also adversely affected by the change The destruction of the existing agrarian structure, of course, most adversely affected the life of the raiyats The raiyat became the victim of two fold oppression—feudal and colonial So the peasant question became the most acute social question of the day

These objective conditions made agrarian unrest inevitable It was natural that the raiyats who formed the bulk of the rural population acted as the main driving force in the spontaneous outbursts against the colonial order In most cases, the peasants elected their own leaders Sometimes the leaders were invested with supernatural powers Sometimes the spiritual leaders (the *mollahs*, priests etc) identified themselves with the aspirations of their peasant followers and organised peasant movements in a religious garb Sometimes dispossessed zamindars also used the discontent of the peasants to gain their own ends

The first formidable peasant rising made its appearance in Rangpur (1783) It assumed the character of an armed pea-

[6] Here the word *Hindu* is used as a variant for *Indian*

sant rebellion in which the Hindu and the Muslim peasant fought side by side like brothers in arms in which if the Hindu acted as the Nawab the Muslim as his Dewan It was a powerful demonstration of the peasants against the new farming experiments launched by the Company's Government

Among the innumerable peasant actions connected with the effects of the Permanent Settlement we may refer to certain typical cases For instance the Sherpur pargana of the district of Mymensingh became the scene of a powerful peasant rising known as the revolt of the *Pagalpanthis* Peasants broke out in open revolt in 1825 (and again in 1833) against the local zamindars It was a spontaneous outburst against the excessive exactions by the zamindars in the form of rackrents and abwabs It was also partly a protest against the imposition of forced labour or begari as the raiyats were forced to work for the Company's establishment without any remuneration

The Wahab insurrection (1831) in Barasat was also in the nature of an outburst against the oppression of the zamindar (illegal abwabs rack renting and laws of distraint) Fought under the flag of religion it assumed such a formidable character that the Government had to employ troops against the rebels and the revolt was brutally suppressed By its very nature the revolt was confined to the Muslim community and its Wahabi sect only*

The Farazis were a kindred brotherhood who also used the religious banner to fight against each and every act of oppression on the part of the zamindar and the indigo planter They had armed clashes with the zamindars They made frequent attacks on the indigo factories During the revolt of 1857 Dudhu Miyan the leader was detained in Alipore Jail as a precautionary measure

Peasant unrest was not however confined to Bengal It was a general feature in all the provinces under the Company's Government In 1817 there was in Khurda (Orissa) a rebellion of the *paiks* a kind of local militia to whom the English rule brought little but ruin and oppression The resumption of *paikan* lands was the main cause of the revolt Led by Jagabandhu the Dewan of the Raja of Khurda who himself was dispossessed of his ancestral property it assumed a formidable character The whole of the Khurda estate was in a state of insurrection Mar-

tial law was declared and the British troops were employed on a large scale to bring the rebels to submission [10]

Mysore, which was then a native state, bound by a subsidiary treaty, was the scene of another powerful peasant insurrection in 1830 31 The peasants of Nagar, in the present district of Shimoga, rose in arms and set up a peasant *Raj* under a peasant leader, Sadar Molla by name Half the *Raj* was in a state of insurrection The Mysore Raja's forces had to suffer defeat after defeat at the hands of the rebels At last the subsidiary troops were called into action and the rebellion was put down [11]

By a treaty (1826) the Brahmaputra valley passed under British rule The track was cleared, bungalows were erected and there was the gradual infiltration of European engineers and Bengali contractors The transformation of the country, the presence of Europeans and other foreign elements posed a challenge to the village community of the Khasis Their movement was the result of their universal antipathy towards foreign domination [1]

There was widespread disaffection among the tribal people in Chotanagpur The Mundas broke out into an open rebellion in 1831 It was caused by the oppression of the *banias* and mahajans who dispossessed the original tribal proprietors from their ancestral lands The conflagration spread over the district of Ranchi overflowed into Hazaribagh the Tori pargana of Palamou and the western portion of Manbhum It was a powerful rebellion that caused much embarrassment to the Government [1]

In 1855 a formidable rebellion threatened the very existence of British rule over a large area of land inhabited by the Santhals The causes were the oppression of the mahajan the tyranny of the zamindar the imposition of increased rent by the Government the imposition of forced labour by the European railway contractors the derogation of the rights of the *manjhi* and the *pargainat* etc So on all counts the Company's rule appeared to the Santhals to be highly loathsome It posed a threat to the whole system of their life So the *manjhis* as the natural leaders of the Santhal community took up the challenge, formed a confederacy of their own and made a last bid to save their community and their way of life The Santhals took special care to draw into their ranks the lower castes' like the

Domes the Bauris, the Lohars the Gowalas and others With their assistance they established a poor man's raj over Damin-i-koh and the adjoining areas of the districts of Birbhum and Bhagalpur."

The great rebellion of 1857 was therefore not an accidental phenomenon The long chain of revolts that preceded it shows that there was widespread and general discontent in the country The Chuars the Kols and the Santhals participated in the revolt of 1857 in a big way In fact the peasants were the driving force of the rebellion though the leadership came mainly from a section of the ruined aristocracy

In the post-Mutiny period spontaneous peasant risings remained the general feature though in Bengal and Bombay, there were some variations in the picture In Malabar what was known as the Moplah (Mapilla) rebellion (1836-1885) was actually a long series of agrarian outrages committed by Muslim peasants on their Hindu landlords The *jannm* (landlord) whose position was raised by British rulers resorted to a systematic policy of rack-renting and eviction The Mapilla outrages' says a British officer 'were designed to counter-act the overwhelming influence of the *jannms* in the exercise of the novel powers of ouster and rentraising conferred on them by the British Courts' Religious fanaticism added to the determination of the rebels The Muslim priest gave sanction to the acts of the rebel peasants when he declared "It is no sin but a merit to kill a *jannm* who evicts But it must be remembered that the 'Moplah rebellion was basically a struggle between peasants and landlords and there was little religious motivation The British Government put its entire weight on the side of the *jannms* and the rebellion was put down

The British policy of adding tax upon tax brought about a violent outburst in Assam The house tax the tobacco tax the licence tax the income tax—the imposition of one tax after another—exasperated the people who often organised *mels* (mass assemblages for passive resistance) as a mark of protest There was a very serious outbreak at Pholgooree in the district of Nowgong in 1861 (October) in which Lieutenant Singer, a Commissioner was surrounded by several thousand Lullungs and Cacharees He was attacked with clubs and killed in cold blood

In the Santhal parganas there was a fresh round of prolonged agitation over the rent question The question of rent gradually became fused with the question of some socio religious reforms giving rise to the *Kharwar* movement The immediate cause was census or settlement operations Huge assemblages were held in which it was resolved to form combinations and to persevere till the ends were achieved There were also sporadic outbursts leading to acts of violence The Lieutenant Governor observed— In the greater part of Santhalia a settlement is going on under Regulation I of 1872 between the zamindars (chiefly Bengalis) and the ryots (chiefly Santhals) The object of the Santhals seemed to be to bring pressure upon landlords whether Government or zamindars with the object to get a reduction of rent at the expiry of the settlement period He concluded On every occasion of a Santhal rising there is doubtless a principal cause On this occasion I think the cause is a spirit of resistance to payment of rent

The Rampa rebellion (1879 80) broke out in the Godavari district of the present Andhra Pradesh It was caused by the exactions of a *mansabdar* appointed by the British Government. He doubled the quit rent and levied taxes on fuel and grazing and other unauthorised cesses The growing discontent among the people was increased by new *abkari* regulations by which toddy tappers were left to the mercy of rentiers who demanded fees for the right to tap toddy The disturbed area covered over 5 000 square miles of hilly country The rebellion was suppressed by the British troops which included as many as six regiments of Madras infantry [5]

In the post Mutiny period Bengal was the scene of a prolonged peasant agitation The indigo rising (1860) was an event of great importance The main centre of revolt was the district of Nadia It gradually spread to the outlying districts of Jessore Khulna Murshidabad and Maldah The peasants took to mass combination and organised a non cooperation movement on a gigantic scale until indigo cultivation came to a dead stop The rebellion became so formidable that it led Lord Canning to declare that for about a week it caused me more anxiety than I have had since the days of Delhi and from that day I felt that a shot fired in anger or fear by one foolish planter might put every factory in lower Bengal in flames [6]

Between 1873 and 1875 there was a protracted rent agitation in the districts of Pabna, Bogra Dacca and Mymensingh Pabna set the pattern It was caused by a fresh attempt on the part of the zamindars to effect a large enhancement both by direct increase of rent and by the consolidation of rent and cesses The rebels relied chiefly on militant mass actions of the entire peasantry They organised rebel leagues (Bidrohi Samitis) and forced the zamindars to retreat[8]

These peasant risings brought some new elements into the picture The most important new element was the support that the rebel peasants received from an enlightened section of the educated middle class though that support was always expressed through the constitutional channel In Bengal a rich crop of literature appeared espousing the cause of the peasants In this connection some books deserve special mention, e g Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay s Bangadesher Krishak" Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay s Bengal Ryots", R C Dutt's The Peasantry of Bengal' and Abhoy Charan Das's The Indian Ryot' [9]

More or less a similar scene was enacted in the Bombay Presidency What was styled as Deccan Riots (1875) was actually a mass upsurge of the poor people against moneylenders In Poona and Ahmednagar the Marwari money lenders were singled out as the target of attack They were subjected to a complete social boycott There were huge assemblages in the villages where it was decided to punish the wrong doer Marwari money-lenders were attacked and their houses and shops were burnt down The object of the rebels was in every case to obtain and destroy the bonds, decrees etc in the possession of the creditors British troops intervened in defence of the propertied classes and order was restored [9] The movement received support from a section of progressive intellectuals as is evidenced by the reports published in *Dynan Chaksu* a vernacular newspaper (Poona)

Not only the peasants but also the plebians and other peoples of the towns occasionally broke out into open outbursts against the colonial policy of adding tax upon tax In 1810 11 there was a powerful movement of the people of the town of Benares against the imposition of the House Tax A mass assemblage

and demonstration which started on the 25th December, 1810 continued till January 4, 1811 for more than a week, showing an exemplary power of unity and demonstration In 1813 the Government cutchery was mobbed by the people at Dacca who demonstrated against the imposition of the Police Tax In Bareilly in 1816 there broke out an insurrection directed against the imposition of Chowkidari Tax In Surat a mass movement was organised against the imposition of Salt Tax in 1844 The agitation against the Licence Tax in Assam has already been mentioned

It may also be mentioned that there were occasional outbursts of the coolies in the tea gardens in Assam against the high handed policy of the British planters In October 1859 for example, there was a spontaneous strike of the Cachari coolies in the employ of Assam Company at the Nazirah and adjoining factories

These peasant risings had a positive revolutionary content By these risings the exploiters (zamindars mahajans planters etc) were marked out as the immediate enemies of the people These risings also ruthlessly exposed the exploitative character of the British colonial rule and turned into schools in which the people had their lessons in the revolutionary tradition It is however wrong to paint these risings with a modern brush The methods that the rebels adopted were rough and ready Their actions were local and sporadic The consciousness of the peasants was at a very low level An appeal to a religious flag or to a spiritual guide the tendency to look upon peasant leaders as messiahs kings or badshahs speak of their medieval outlook Utopian theories were designed to give expression to the *aspirations of the peasants miracles were worked up to sup* port and strengthen the belief that their stick would do better than the enemy s gun In all cases it was an unequal fight—the fight between a government which used modern weapons of warfare and the rebels whose only weapons were sticks spears and swords So the failure of these risings was inevitable although ideas persisted and discontent died hard

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TRIBAL RESISTANCE IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS (1776 87)

SIRAJUL ISLAM

When an established socio political order is suddenly put into disorder by any external thrust resistance is inevitable no matter how simple or complex the society affected might be[1] Bengal is no exception to this universal historical experience It will indeed be a serious misinterpretation of history if one assumes as has been the general tendency among the traditional historians that the British rule was established in Bengal unconsciously and without any resistance from the people It is far from that After completion of their military conquests, when the British began to rehabilitate themselves politically in the country by introducing new elements into and by making necessary changes in the structure of the established constitution customs and usages of the country the people being unaccustomed to such a shift at local level in the wake of political change at the centre had offered resistance a resistance on the part of all classes of people—regional chiefs zamindars talukdars peasants artisans tribals even by the ascetic mendicants[2] For over half a century the Company Bahadur had to keep itself militarily alert and engaged against frequent armed resistance and civil disobedience of the affected people who were determined to preserve the established order In the milieu of resistance movements some were too distinctive to escape the notice of objective historians The Chakma Kuki resistance in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was one of them

To grapple with the problem a short description of the early settlement and social development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is essential Originally the region was inhabited by different tribes such as Mro Kuki Khyongs Pankos etc[3] Anthropologically all these tribes may be lumped into one ethnic group known as Kuki group Another major tribe inhabiting the area

was the Tipperah Besides the Kuki and Tipperahs a third ethnic group was added to the area after the Mughal conquest of the Chittagong province in 1666[1] The Mugs and Chakmas—the two leading Arakanese tribes were inimical to each other The Mugs were arch enemies of the Mughals Hence, the Chakmas had showed friendly disposition to the Mughal government Being chased by the Mugs the Chakmas deserted lower Chittagong and settled in the Hill Tracts under the protection of the Mughal government Since the Hill Tracts were still out of the influence of money economy the Chittagong Foujdar used to collect revenue from the Chakmas and Kukis in kind In Mughal revenue parlance the Chittagong Hill Tracts came to be known as *kapash* or cotton *mahal* Apart from collecting the fixed amount of cotton precisely 501 maunds annually through an appointed agent, the government hardly ever interfered in the Hill people's internal affairs which were entirely left to themselves

In 1733, the Chakma chief Shermast Khan had obtained a zamindari sanad for Chakla Rangunia, a hilly tract, and it is in the capacity of a zamindar that the Chakma chief came under the direct control of the government The Chittagong province was treated by Mughal government more as a military outpost against the Arakanese Mug inroads than as a source of revenue Hence the policy of the Mughals was to keep the local people contented by granting them *lakhiraj* or rent-free lands liberally It was thus found at the time of cession of the district to the Company (1760) that 'two thirds of the best of the cultivated lands in this Province are held by Charity sunnuds'[2]

The Company's policy was to unsettle all these privileges Immediately after the acquisition of the district the Company's government had adopted various measures to increase its revenue Rents were increased rent-free lands were resumed kapash mahal was farmed out to a non-tribal speculator and Rangunia pargana was farmed out to an oppressive bania from Calcutta All these unprecedented measures had offended the Hill chief and the Hill people so much so that in 1776 they being desperate started an armed resistance movement by rejecting the British rule formally

The grievances of the rebels were not many but serious First the tribal way of life was disturbed by the Government farmer

in the Kapash mahal Secondly the Rangunia estate of the Hill chief was frequently measured with a view to enhancing revenue demands and the Government farmer oppressed the ryots by levying various illegal cesses Thirdly rent-free lands of the Chief in Rangunia estate were mostly declared illegal and brought under rent All these experiences were entirely new to the chief The Mughal Government had seldom interfered into the internal organisation of the tribal life and the tribal chief was then required to pay only a modest fixed rent in kind The chief Juan Baksh Khan and his people were naturally infuriated by the annoying innovations introduced by the British and they revolted with determination that so long as their former autonomy was not restored they would continue to fight against the unjust Company s Government

Juan Baksh Khan the Hill Chief had no regular army nor had much means to raise any Hence to resist the British rule the only way out for him was to adopt guerilla tactics for which the Hill terrains were also wonderfully appropriate Juan was not slow to understand this and he was lucky to find in Ranu Khan his naib an extraordinary leader for such guerilla resistance Ranu Khan s hit and run policy can be gleaned from the petition of the zamindars and Chaudhuris of the regions bordering the hills In June 1778 the zamindars and Chaudhuris had submitted an eight point *arzee* in which they complained that Juan Baksh and his general Ranu Khan erected *neeshans* or flag of independence on the Company s land and they were compelled by him to pay revenue to Juan Baksh and withdraw their loyalty to the Company" The landholders further said that Ranu Khan s men had established complete authority on them In a circular order the Governor General and Council noticed "

> By the complaint of the Sircar Islamabad aforesaid it is known that Juan Bucks Cawn and Runnoo Cawn, do great oppression to the Talookdars and royetts belonging to them that they extorted Nuzzers and Seedahs from them, take away their Royetts to erect the Houses of their *Khanauns* and *Pulwauns* who also extort from the *Royetts* one Rupee per day punish them according to their will, demand Paddy for their use with threats if they are not supplied they will take by force prevent pastering the Cattle upon the Hills cutting Bamboes, Firewood Straw *Rattan* & ca and if any

is permitted a fine is exacted for the same also erect *Neeshans* on the *Jummabundy* Lands and prevent the Royetts to bring the same into cultivation and insist on giving *Cobluahs* and taking *Pottahs* from them also wound and kill *Royetts* and Plunder them of their Effects and Property and Carry away their Cattles into their own *Kheels*

That Juan Bucks and Runnoo Cawn also send their own *Pahuans* and other People and Carry away the Royetts by force and punish and fine them according to their own will — This is therefore to give notice that you are to apprehend all persons belonging to Runnoo Cawn and Jaun Bucks committing oppressions and preventing them cutting Bamboes *Rottans* Firewood Straw & c and bring them to the Huzzoor — Any person acting contrary to these orders they will be surely punished

The organisation of the resistance movement of the Hill Chief Juan Baksh who now styled himself as the raja was very much like that of modern guerilla warfare Juan Baksh was the supreme leader politically but the military leadership was vested in Ranu Khan who now styled himself as the prime minister All strategies were chalked out by him and the major operations were led by himself The military leaders second in command were Boolab Chore Toothan Shuckdas etc[9] Under them were the armies called *pahuans*[10] Palwans were drawn from all tribes especially Kukis The comrades in arms had no fixed habitation As a matter of strategy they used to change places of residence very frequently and they mostly remained sky clad To remain nude was both a tradition as well as a guerilla necessity for easy movement and hiding Spade spears arrows were mainly their arms[11]

The official records indicate that Juan Baksh and Ranu had made the whole of the Hill Tracts independent of British rule and they were in addition trying to extend their jurisdiction to all of Rangunia and other adjoining tracts of the plains The brunt of their incursion was on Rangunia zone which formed their former zamindari From 1777 to 1781 three full scale military expeditions were sent against the rebels under the command of European officers but all attempts to subdue them proved to be a failure[12] Narrating unsuccessful operations against the Hill guerillas the Chitta

gong authority wrote to the Governor General Warren Hastings confessing his ungrounded complacency that

> as the Man (Ranu Khan) had been all along looked on as one of no rank or consideration I was flattered with the hopes of securing his person and thereby at once putting an end to his evil designs and practices but this scheme proved abortive the man fled from his usual place of residence and the sepoys 50 in number sent up against him met with resistance pursued the enemy and took and burnt two or three Hillocks and villages where they made head this was not sufficient to intimidate him he has assembled men in yet larger bodies who tho ill armed harrassed the few sepoys on the expeditions on which Captain Ellerker the Commanding Officer judged proper yesterday to send reinforcements making in all 115 sepoys the number now employed who are opposed by large bodys of Cooker men who have been called in by Runnoo Cawn and who live far interior parts of the hills who have not the use of fire arms and whose bodys go unclothed

The Chittagong authority was convinced that by traditional *method of warfare it was not possible to bring a guerilla leader* like Ranu Khan to his knees It was suggested that since life in the hill was impossible without regular supply of essential goods from the plains an iron curtain should be raised against the hill people by stopping all supplies from the plains It may be pointed out here that the hill men were dependent on the plains for many essential goods such as dry fish salt earthen wares iron wares groceries spices etc The Chittagong authority thus wrote to the Governor General

> I perceive now it will be difficult if not impossible to secure *this Runnoo Cawn who has no fixed habitation however* one method yet remains which if steadfastly pursued will and must bring him to a due obedience to the English Government which is the issuing positive orders forbidding the supply of salt posts etc which he obtains from our districts This I mean to enforce by every act of vigour on the offenders by punishing those families which furnish the supplies and depriving the chowdhuris or zamindars of their lands who connive at such practices [5]

The last portion of the extract only indicates that the local land

holders and other people had no hostility towards the resisting leaders and were even prepared to cooperate with them by providing them with necessary supplies

In October 1777 orders were issued prohibiting all supplies to the hills from the plains till Rannoo Cawn surrenders But instead of surrendering to such economic pressure, Ranu Khan had rather created a counter-pressure by cutting off the fuel woods from the hills[1] The salt manufacture in Chittagong region was dependent on fuel woods supplied from the hills and naturally Ranu Khan's action had serious repurcussions on salt manufacture Salt was a state monopoly The disruption in salt supply in the market was thus not only a political embarrassment but also a loss of profit to which the merchant government gave the highest priority while formulating policies A government based on the consideration of credit and debit profit and loss cannot afford to further protract a war which had little prospect of immediate victory and which even won, could not be equal to the loss incurred through the war Ranu Khan's resistance was likely to be as protracted as that of Shivaji against Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century

Seeing the blockade ineffective the government as a last resort, had adopted the policy of creating divisions among the rank and file of Ranu Khan's fighting forces by various mean methods They tried to impress upon the Kukis that they were ethnically different from the Chakmas who were trying to advance themselves at the expense of the Kukis The Kukis were offered handsome presents if they agreed to disassociate themselves from the rebellious Chakmas and if they helped the Government locate and apprehend Ranu Khan[19] Conversely, to create division among the Chakma leadership, agents were employed to make Juan Baksh Khan believe that as a result of the war Ranu Khan was in fact becoming the actual chief of the Chakmas Juan Baksh had reasons to apprehend ambition in Ranu Khan because the whole resistance movement was led by Ranu Khan who was actually becoming so popular and powerful that he could easily defy his master and get the tribal chieftainship in his own person The 'divide and rule' strategy worked wonderfully Keeping Ranu Khan in the dark, Juan Baksh had opened a secret dialogue with the government which culminated in a formal invitation of the

Governor General in Council to Juan Baksh to come to Calcutta to settle the problem politically.[4]

Juan Baksh went to Calcutta in February 1787 and signed a peace treaty with the government to the effect that the Company would recognise him as the bonafide chief of the Hill Tracts where he would rule without much interference from the government. It was also agreed that Juan Baksh would be reinstated in his zamindari of Rangunia and as a zamindar he would be subject to the normal law of the country like other zamindars.[5] Ranu Khan, so long the supreme military leader of the resistance movement, but now being forsaken by political leadership went into underground and was never heard of since then.

NOTES

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THE KHASIS AND THE ENGLISH (1783 90)

NIKHILES GUHA

Political considerations have of late contributed to enhance the importance of the study of north-east India Geographically the area has some distinct characteristics of its own The Himalayan ranges mark the boundary of the Indian sub-continent in this direction In close contiguity run the frontiers of Burma China and Tibet The mountain ranges act as sentinels to the plain lands and are in addition rich in natural resources For anthropologists ethnologists and sociologists the region is of the nature of a human laboratory awaiting further discovery The historian's attempt to reconstruct the past of the region is beset by two kinds of problems first, that of envisaging the nature of the tribal order and the changes that occur in it The second kind of difficulty lies in identifying verifying and trying to weave a pattern out of the various bits of information that are found scattered among diverse sources In the present paper we are concerned with the history of the Khasis at the time they first came into conflict with the English

The Khasi and Jaintia hills form the central section of the watershed between the valleys of the two rivers Brahmaputra and the Surma Northward the hills rise gradually from the Brahmaputra valley in a succession of low ranges covered with dense evergreen forest To the south however the Khasi hills spring to a height of 4000 feet commanding the Surma valley The districts of Sylhet (at present in Bangladesh) in the south and Cachar and Nowgong in Assam in the east mark the outlying areas The Jaintia hills are lower in altitude The British in India first moved close to these highlands when Sylhet came into their hands after the acquisition of the dewani from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II in 1765

The first English official to have turned his attention seriously to the Khasis was Robert Lindsay In 1772 he became the

Resident of Sylhet Lindsay's imagination was fired by the prospect of commercial gain in the mountains Writing subsequently of the prospects that lay before him, he thus put his thoughts on paper.

'The mountain (Khasi hills) produced wood of various kinds, adapted to boat and ship building, and also iron of a very superior quality and description, little known in this country, it is brought down from the hills in lumps of adhesive sand and, being put into the forge produces excellent malleable iron without ever undergoing the process of fusion, the hammer and fire discharging the dross and coarser particles at once, thus producing what is called virgin iron superior to any made in Europe by charcoal Silks of a coarse quality called *moongadutties*, are also brought from the frontiers of China for the Malay trade, and considerable quantities of iron in bars, and a small quantity of European goods are carried up to barter for these goods'[1]

'Exclusive of the larger branches of commerce already mentioned, there are minor articles brought to a considerable amount, such as coarse muslins, ivory, honey, gums and drugs for the European market and in the fruit season an inexhaustible quantity of the finest oranges found growing spontaneously in the markets But the only great and steady article of commerce is *chunam* or lime In no part of Bengal or even Hindostan, is the rock found so perfectly pure, or so free of alloy, as in this province, therefore Calcutta is chiefly supplied from hence

The goods were carried in person and women chiefly were engaged in bringing the merchandise down That at least was what Robert Lindsay saw during a brief stay in Pandua 'The burthens were carried by the women in baskets supported by a belt across the forehead the men walking by their side, protecting them with their arms The elderly women in general were ugly in the extreme and of masculine appearance their mouths and teeth are as black as ink from the inordinate use of the betel-leaf mixed with lime On the other hand, the young girls are both fair and handsome, not being allowed the use of betel-nut until after their marriage In appearance they resemble very much the Malay The strength of their arms and limbs, from constant muscular exercise in ascending and descending these

mountains loaded with heavy burthens far exceeds our idea I asked one of the girls to allow me to lift her burthen of iron—from its weight I could not accomplish it This I need not say, occasioned a laugh in the line of march to my prejudice

Access to the lime quarries was extremely hazardous From Pandua where Lindsay first met the Khasi chiefs seeking a lease of the lime rock the route (as described by him) was almost of the kind that one meets with in stories of adventure

Half a dozen canoes were manned on the occasion each carrying six stout men furnished with paddles for the smooth water and long poles to push the boat over the rapids For a few miles we got on well with the paddles by degrees we got into the broken water when the first rapid came full in view the poles were then resorted to and we got through it without much difficulty A couple of miles further brought us to the second which was infinitely more rapid than the former the people were obliged to push the boat under the banks and pull it up with ropes At the entrance to the third rapid the noise was tremendous and the worries of the people were no longer discernible but as they betrayed no fear I determined to persevere As the water had become more shallow, the people jumped out and nearly by main force lifted the canoe over the stones

We now approached the chunam or lime rock washed by the rapid stream—a magnificent cataract was seen rolling over the adjoining precipice—the scenery altogether was truly sublime The mountain was composed of the purest alabaster lime and appeared in quantity equal to the supply of the whole world When the canoe was loaded at the bottom of the hill they appeared to descend the rapids with the rapidity of lightning Indeed it is often attended with danger and even loss of life when bringing down the lime [4]

In an official document of 1787 Lindsay provided further information about the wild and freedom loving spirit of the Khasis

The Cassenhs call themselves Gentoos* but they eat and drink everything presented to them and excepting that they burn

* Meaning Hindus

their dead their manners do not bear the smallest affinity to the Gentoos of Bengal

Every chief of a village states himself Raja and has an independent Government within his boundaries In appearance they greatly resemble the Malays and their disposition is much the same being revengeful and deliberate in their resentment and never forgive an injury until they have complete satisfaction, but it is a long time before they come to an open rupture with their adversary so as to decide the difference by the sword

They are perfectly independent in their ideas I have often met the Rajahs and principal people by appointment but if it is not upon a footing of perfect equality they decline the visit They allowed me no superiority of rank and are highly tenacious of their own consequence During the eleven years I have resided at Sylhet they never entered the district but twice in arms Both times it was occasioned by a supposed indignity to one of their tribes Men women and children being indiscriminately put to death they showed themselves a barbarous enemy and for a short time were formidable most of the Rajahs having united in one confederacy Upon the whole they were a good set of people with principles far superior to the inhabitants upon the low lands"

There is a tract of country eight miles broad extending from the Surmah river back to the mountains and about forty miles in length inhabited by Bengalis and a mixed race between them and the Casseahs a most degenerate people with the vices of both united It is likewise a receptacle for thieves dacoits and bad men of every description who are tributaries to the Casseahs These are the people who are occasionally so troublesome to the district and in their incursions but a very small proportion of the inhabitants of the mountains accompany them Upon my first arrival at Sylhet I found them so insolent as to camp upon the banks of the river and plunder every boat that passed to and fro from Sylhet Lenient measures had no effect whatever, and I learnt from experience that immediate retaliation by following them back to their own country was the only means of keeping them within bound This was never attempted during the Mughul government but I found it attended with every good effect I wished for and of late years they have been perfectly quiet The

people bordering upon Cachar together with our own zamindars have sometimes ventured to take up arms but were immediately checked [5]

To counter the threat of the Khasis, Lindsay secured permission to build a small block house surrounded by a ditch and a mud wall at Pandua in 1783 The immediate occasion for this was provided by a Khasi attack during the latter part of the year to avenge an insult caused by the havildar of Pandua to a member of the tribe This was the first serious encounter between the English and the Khasis who had by this time come in possession of firearms The struggle continued for more than two months Lindsay would have acceded to their demands had they not pressed for the havildar's head From his experiences Lindsay also persuaded the authorities to organise a body of regular sepoys for the defence of Sylhet instead of continuing to rely on barkandases (or irregular sepoys) as before [6] The last struggle that Lindsay had to engage in against the Khasis was in 1787 when one of their leaders Radharam with a band of Kukis (another hill tribe from Tripura) had waste some parganas to the east of Sylhet His activities were suppressed [7]

By the time Willis succeeded Lindsay as the Collector of Sylhet in 1789 the Khasis had further gained possession of five divisions of the Laur pargana that had formerly been under the control of a local chief called Omeid Razah who owed allegiance to the Company The losses incurred by the English amounted in the opinion of Willis to about Rs 5000 annually Also the Khasis encroached on the Company's authority in Pandua and collected a sum of Rs 500 Their advances were Willis thought secretly instigated by the landholders in the plain of Sylhet who hoped to gain by revenue remission from the troubles that followed each wave of depredation Willis like Lindsay before him advocated the adoption of a two-fold policy resistance to any attack from the hills by the Khasis and a strict watch on the Bengalis of the plains Thus he wrote to the Governor-General (Lord Cornwallis) in a letter dated 18 November 1789

From what I have seen I do not conceive the Khasias are a dangerous and warlike people For the preservation of our parganah it seems requisite that we should not pass over their

offences with impunity but by a speedy though temperate retaliation these may be less frequent but no arrangement can absolutely secure us from them I would further advise that the lands of the Bengali Khasias where the eruption is made be immediately sold The eruption never takes place where the Khasias are not advised by the landholders After an eruption the revenue of the Company is less viz the Bengalis and the Khasias divide the produce which at present is that from Panduah to Laur [8]

Internal feuds among the Khasis of Barrakeah drew the English into a war with them in 1789 The trouble grew out of a rivalry between the two leading families of the place Baroo the head of one family murdered Bhavani Singh and imprisoned his younger brother Ganga Singh who was then a minor The boy however managed to escape into the mountains with his mother The area was thereby divided into two armed camps with members of both sides living by plundering whatever merchant boat happened to pass along the Surmah Baroo threw in his fortunes with the English and was appointed Chaudhury (or revenue-collector) by them of the pargana of Saumnagar that comprised of some lands that he had bought for himself in the paraganas of Daulia and Bunbdna Besides he was put in charge of some small ghats near Chattack On reaching manhood Ganga Singh returned to take his revenge On a Dussera night in 1786 he and his men killed Baroo Choudhury when the latter was returning by boat after completing the immersion ceremony of the Goddess Baroo's family members were shortly after put to death [9] This brought the English on the scene They were joined in the attack on Ganga Singh by two Khasi chiefs Obor Singh and Sooba Singh along with some other leading zamindars near Barrakeah with great anxiety and seriousness William Hyndman who held the post of the Collector of Sylhet in a stop-gap capacity for a year in 1788 between the departure of Lindsay and the arrival of Willis had to consider restraining them to avoid the possibility of supporting a powerful chief on the plains who from his strength in the hills near Pandua might become a much more troublesome neighbour [10] English aims in this campaign as reflected in the directions to the Collector of Sylhet indicate the general policy

of containment pursued by them at this stage toward the Khasis

That he (the Collector of Sylhet) subject to his authority all the country to the north of the river Surmah within the line of the Company's frontier the district of Barrakeah excepted

That the hill Casseahs be not permitted to hold any lands in the low country within the Company's limit either as proprietors or farmers, or under any tenure whatsoever, and that he attach all lands within such limits as are now in their possession, and transmit an account of them to you to be laid before us for information'

That he acquaint the Casseahs that they will be allowed a free intercourse with the Company's territories for the purpose of trade provided they conduct themselves peaceably towards the inhabitants, that they will not be permitted to come down in armed bodies, and should they ever appear in that hostile manner within the Company's limits or make any inroads into their territories that a force will be immediately despatched into their country with directions to punish them as private enemies and invaders'

'That it appears that Barrakeah from being situated in the midst of the Company's lands and being exempt from their authority is become a place of refuge from dacoits and disorderly people who plunder the neighbouring country and obstruct the navigation of the river Surmah, he inform the Zamindars and inhabitants thereof that should they make any incursions into the Company's territories or commit robberies, or harbour robbers and dacoits a force will be despatched to seize the offenders and bring them to trial in the fauzdari court in the same manner as if they had been apprehended within the Company's limits That he notify a resolution to the Barrakeah people and further inform them that upon a repetition of such offences they will be dispossessed of their lands altogether'

'That the military now sent to his assistance is to be employed in establishing his authority in the low country to the north of the river Surmah within the Company's limits, and oblige the proprietors of the soil and inhabitants at large to pay a due obedience to the laws That he is not to march the force beyond the limits of the Company's territories unless they shall be first invaded by the Casseahs or the hill people, in which case

he will direct the troops to follow them into their own country as far as they may be able to proceed with safety to themselves, and chastise them as invaders and public enemies'

According to these instructions, Willis in a letter to the Commander of the English forces at Sylhet, Lieut. James Cheape, advised clearly 'It is the wish of government to restore order rather by intimidating the disaffected into a proper course of their duty than to reduce them to obdience by any violent exertions I, therefore, hope that in any instance you will consider them as the Company's ryots and not as public enemies'[11] Ganga Singh could not hold out against his opponents for long his enemies from among the Khasis contributing especially to his fall[12] At the beginning of 1790 he submitted as the head of the ryots of Barrakeah to Cheape following a sudden night attack by the English commander upon his headquarters at that place[13] Cheape was not in favour of putting him in chains and sending him to Sylhet but was forced to take this measure upon instructions from Willis[14] The Collector of Sylhet in turn had no desire of sending him for trial to Murshidabad as the case could be speedily dismissed before the fauzdari darogah at Sylhet itself Besides, the government would have to incur an expense of about rupees four to five thousand if all the witnesses against him (numbering altogether fifty) were to be sent to Murshidabad and the men themselves would be unwilling to leave Sylhet the place of their work[15] In spite to this objection Ganga Singh was sent first to Murshidabad and then to Calcutta according to orders of the Bengal government The Naib Nazim at the latter place passed the death sentence on him Sahibram the heir and nephew to Baroo, was vested with the title of Chaudhury, and put in charge of all the Company's territories over which his uncle had authority Besides, he was put in charge of Ganga Singh's lands in Barrakeah and given in compensation what property could be recovered from the insurgent The death sentence on Ganga Singh had, however to be revoked due to the opposition of the Collector of Sylhet As Willis pointed out, this would not only be a violation of the pledge of personal security on which Ganga Singh had submitted, but serve little purpose Already four Khasi leaders (Wadadars) and the inhabitants of fourteen villages (punjees) in a letter to Willis on 30 November

1790 had expressed their desire to submit but held back since Ganga Singh had not made his return 'Who knows they said, but if we were to come to you we might be treated in the same manner Although their doubts had been settled, the imposition of the death sentence on Ganga Singh would definitely be against the Company's interests Willis pointed out clearly in a letter to Cornwallis

'Many of the Casseah Rajas have come into Sylhet and have promised to enter into agreements for the amicable adjustment of any disputes that may hereafter arise in the boundaries and one of the most turbulent has been induced to send in his nephew to reside in Sylhet in proof of his friendly intentions and as a pledge that he will not in future molest or injure the inhabitants of this district'

The execution of Ganga Singh might in my opinion be productive of an unfavourable alteration in the present sentiments of the Casseahs and thereby endanger the renewal of disturbances which were so long destructive of the peace of the district'

The Casseahs should always I conceive be immediately checked in their depredations and taught to respect our Government, but the punishment of Ganga Singh by death, I am afraid may, after the lapse of nearly three years since the commission of his crimes and an alleged promise of indemnity, rather be considered by the Casseahs as an act of unjust resentment than as a merited attribute for his crimes Should his execution not act upon their fears to the prevention of future offences it would lose its principal object and therefore even in this view solely it appears worthy of consideration whether it would not be proper to revise the sentence passed by the Naub Nazim '[16]

Since enquiries from Cheap revealed that Ganga Singh had indeed submitted on a promise of personal security by the commander of the English troops at Sylhet, the Board of Revenue decided ultimately to revoke the death sentence on him and subjected him instead to rigorous imprisonment for life In the first phase of their relation with the Khasis (1783-90) the British had followed successfully at one and the same time a policy of resistance to the Khasis in case of any invasion from their side, without seeking to make any territorial gains of their own

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3 *Ibid* pp 179-180
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13 Cheape to Barlow 24 Sept 1792 in Rev (Judl) Progs 28 Sept, 29 Oct, 1792, No 8
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THE KOL INSURRECTION (1831-32)

J C JHA

The Kol insurrection was a sort of a millenary and populist movement aimed at creating an ideal world where there would be no exploitation a cry for vengeance on the rich and the oppressors a vague dream of some curb upon them, a righting of individual wrongs'[1] Indeed the tribesmen of the central Chota Nagpur plateau, as well as of Palamau and Patkum on its two sides who raised the banner of revolt from December 1831 to 1832 wanted to recreate their old world—to restore "a traditional world in which men are justly dealt with" Like the Bhumijes of Dhalbhum and Manbhum in 1832-33 the Santals of the Santal Parganas in 1855-56 and the Mundas under Birsa in Chota Nagpur in 1895-1901 the Mundas, the Oraons, the Kharwars, the Cheros and others of the Chota Nagpur plateau rose in 1831-32 in the face of the oppression of the non tribal landlords, money-lenders and other land-grabbers "in despair of getting justice through the machinery of law"[2]

Indeed, the history of the tribesmen of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, generally called the Kols had been "a somewhat distressing record of the effects of an alien civilization impinging on simple and backward peoples" since the advent of the British rule[3] No wonder these unfortunate tribesmen, long exploited and looked down upon by the non-tribal adventurers showed a peculiar madness carrying "fire, rapine and murder" According to a contemporary Calcutta journal five-sixths of the inhabitants of the plateau were up in arms against the remaining one-sixth[4]

The insurrection which began in the Sonepur Pargana bordering Singhbhum, was also joined by the Larka Kols of Kolhan Initially the rebels just plundered some cattle, but when they realised that there was hardly any resistance from the non tribals and the British troops were not readily available they became more violent and soon there was an orgy of slaughter and arson which drove the non-tribals from this area Only a few found

shelter near Capt T Wilkinson s Ramgarh battalion headquarters and an unusual refugee problem was created

The wanton attacks devastations and frightful slaughters brought about a general alarm According to Major Sutherland, if the areas between Chota Nagpur and Calcutta on the one hand and Banaras on the other had been inhabited by the Kols the insurrection would have spread to all these places At one time it was rumoured that Mirzapur in U P a great commercial centre was about to be attacked by some five thousand rebels [9] Indeed there was a commotion from Chota Nagpur to Awadh (Oudh) [10] It was also rumoured that the Marathas were joining the Kol rebels [11] and that they were proceeding to Sasaram in Western Bihar through the Rohtas hills [12]

In the neighbouring Jungle Mahals (Manbhum and Dhalbhum) on the east there was a great terror and alarm" caused by the insurrection and the non tribals dug up large pits near their houses to conceal their effects in the case of an emergency [13] On the western side Palamau was also in turmoil When in January 1832 a case of plunder was reported from the vicinity of Bamaghati on the *dak* (postal) road from Midnapur to Sambalpur it was first said to be a part of the Kol insurrection but later it was found to be a separate affair connected with the dispute between the Mayurbhanj raja and the Bamanghati chief in which the Larka Kols of Singhbhum were active participants [14]

Strangely enough a Calcutta journal thought that the Kol insurgents were connected with the Maulvis who rose in 1831 under Titu Mir and were called rahzans [15] Such speculations were very common in those days

A report from the military camp at Silli in Chota Nagpur compared the Kol insurrection with the Bristol riots of Britain in 1832 and remarked that "in an insurrection even in a civilized country the leaders had it not in their power to prevent plunder even the plunder of their friends if rich as we plainly perceive by reviewing the late proceedings at Bristol" [16]

It may not be appropriate to make such comparisons with the risings in the non tribal societies But John Houlton rightly says that the tribal rebellions like the Santal insurrection of 1855-56 and the Birsa rising of 1895 1901 were similar in nature to the Kol and Bhumij risings [17] for in all these the rebels attacked the

non tribal oppressors and had a conflict with law and order because their tribal system had been violated [8]

Such a conflict is always a hopeless struggles of the weak against the strong the simple minded and uninformed against the organized resources of a powerful system [9] Not that the Kol rebels did not know the might of the Company Bahadur (the English East India Company) They often visited Calcutta for employment and were dazed by the British enterprise resources and power [10] But there was a certain recklessness or desperation in them to do or die

Charles Metcalfe the Vice President of the Governor General's Council at Calcutta asserted that the Kol rebels wanted their independence they wanted the utter annihilation of the Government and the capture of Calcutta In the early phase of the insurrection the rebels firmly believed that the English rule had ended and that water flowed from the English guns –

J Master and W Blunt said that the Kols could never think of subverting the government by their feeble and insignificant efforts [11] True they hardly knew any functionary beyond those of Chota Nagpur and therefore could not think of attacking Calcutta or London but they surely attracted the subordinate officer of the government in Chota Nagpur and even the soldiers operating in that area In the very beginning they threatened the *nazir* of the Sherghati office with dire consequences when he visited Khunti [12] Besides several *chaukidars* (village watchmen) were brutally murdered the *thanas* (police stations) and their records were burnt and the *darogas* (subordinate police officers) were put to flight –

Very often the rebels would tell their victims that a change had taken place in the affairs of the country meaning thereby that the British Raj had ended At one stage some rebels asked Kunwar Harnath Sahi a lesser Hinduised chief Do you still continue to cherish a hope of the *hakims* [English officers] return? Where is the *hakim*?

Even the persons attached to the establishment of the Hinduised Maharaja of Chota Nagpur and the lesser rajas were not spared Thus Sheonarain a *Jamadar* of the maharaja and the former's relatives were murdered and their houses plundered [13] A *tahsildar* (revenue collector) was also killed

At the outset, many Hinduised local zamindars who looked down upon the tribesmen who had at one time been their brethren tried to take undue advantage of the disturbance by attacking the houses of those ryots who had not been too subservient to them.[39] In fact, they even instigated the rebels against the farmers of the land.[40]

But very soon the rebels understood their game and started their vendetta against all the non-tribals settled or working in Chota Nagpur, who were their real enemies. When they had to launch an attack on a village, the rebels would send an arrow[41] to a village headman. If it was accepted by a family it was a mark of friendship and a branch of a tree was placed across the threshold of its houses so that it could not be touched. The remaining houses would be plundered with impunity. However, if the arrow was returned, it was a signal for a confrontation. Again, if it was broken, it would be deemed an unpardonable offence. According to Major Sutherland, this was the custom of the Larka (fighting) Kols of Singhbhum which had been lately adopted by the Munda Kols and the Dhangar Kols of Chota Nagpur.[42]

All contemporary accounts refer to the wanton murder of the non-tribals and the destruction of their property so much so that the flourishing area of the central plateau became a desert and "years would not suffice to restore it to its pristine prosperity".[43] According to a report in the *John Bull* of Calcutta, it was surprising that the tribal rebels armed with bows, arrows, axes etc., marched in thousands, burnt the villages and returned "with the blood of hundreds of defenceless and unsuspecting beings on their hands", to attack the British forces.[44]

When sufficient troops arrived from Barrackpur and Danapur, the rebels often had recourse to guerrilla warfare or bush fighting. They would assemble in a body of two to four thousand men with some women and flourish their battle axes from half a mile off. As soon as the British troops advanced, they would run into the inaccessible ravines and jungles.[45] Even when the East India Company's native infantries with the private armies of some Hinduised local chiefs captured the granaries and flocks of cattles and bags of salt of the rebels and the British guns "did considerable execution",[46] the rebels did not submit when a vi

lage was captured by the troops They climbed up the hills and trees yelled and beat the *nagaras* (big drums) to collect more men They showered arrows on the British Indian troops from the defts of rocks According to the *East Indian United Service Journal*[7] they fought bravely for every bullock or buffaloe which the army seized

A *dhaun* (the branch of a tree generally mango) was sent from one party of tribals to another as a signal for them to join at once and engage in any contemplated exploit The group thus called upon to join was to do so before the leaves of the branch faded away or otherwise they could be punished That is how the spirit of insurrection spread like wildfire from one area to another[8] Kalipada Mitra calls it a universal rising of the Munda Coles[9]

The trial proceedings of the rebels charged with heinous crimes give us some idea of the nature of the attacks on the *sud's* or *dikkus* (non tribals) An infirm Rajput Dahir Singh was forcibly dragged out and hacked to pieces Indeed the worst excesses were perpetrated in Palamau and Patkum than in Chota Nagpur proper[11] A Muslim family fleeing to a safe place was pursued by a group of armed tribesmen who seized and bound its chief member and after bringing him back to the village killed him

The villages held in farm by the non tribals like a Sikh Hari Singh and his relation Dayal Singh or a Muslim Muhammad Ali Naik were the special targets of attack In some cases the non tribal shopkeepers were plundered at the instigation of a *manki* the tribal head of a circle of villages or a munda the head of a munda village

The rebels inflicted seven cuts on some of their victims on account of seven new taxes levied on the former one for the *batta* (discount) on changing copper for silver the second for the excise tax on sprits (*pachai* or *handia*) the third for the proposed tax on opium the fourth for the fines for supposed or real crimes the fifth for the village *salamis* the sixth for the forced labour on the roads and the seventh for the postal taxes on the villages[4]

So much irritated were the rebels with their Hindu exploiters that they entered the latter's temples and looted the valuable

clothes jewels etc or the idols They even broke the images and scattered their pieces The pahans (the religious heads of tribal villages) the mahtos (one of the traditional functionaries of a tribal village) the mankis and the mundas played a prominent role in such operations

Treachery and brutality were very common A young Rajput boy was asked to drop his sword and then cut to pieces a *thika dar* (farmer) of a village was duped and killed the non tribals hiding in the hills and jungles were assured of safety on their return to the villages and once they did so they were murdered in cold blood[44] In one case the Kols compared their Rajput victim to a hunted deer and so he had to die like a hunted deer Several fleeing Muslim families were completely annihilated

The houses of the moneylenders grain merchants farmers of land salt dealers and other such non tribals were special targets of attack Even pregnant and infirm women were not shown any compassion In many cases the heads of the victims were cut off put in a piece of cloth and burnt beyond recognition One head was offered to a deity In many cases the cremation of the dead bodies was not permitted by the rebel leaders

Sometimes the non tribals were asked to save their lives by paying money and even if they complied with that they were killed In one case a house in which females and children were hiding was put on fire

The Kol enmity was particularly directed against the high caste Hindus and upper class Muslims The house of a Brahman (Heeraman) was burnt twenty of his buffaloes driven away and his brother Lala Pandey killed The Brahmans of the village Alug dee were pursued to the hills their property plundered Deolal Pandey severely wounded and his father done to death The victims of the tribal attack were other castes and classes too Jolaha (weaver) Kurmi (cultivator) Rajput (landholder servant or mahajan) Kahar (palanquin or water carrier) Agrawal (mahajan or bania) Dusadh (servant chaukidar or Kotwal) Kalwar (mahajan) Sundi (vendor of liquor and cultivator) and Teli (oil man)

In Palamau most of the Cheros who took part in the insurrection had assumed the title of Singh This indicates that the process of Rajputization had gathered momentum Besides some

Bhogtas who were landholders the Oraons the Mundas and others participated in the turmoil[47] The non tribals whose houses were destroyed in Palamau were Brahmans like Vishnu ram Misra and Asharam Pathak Rajputs like Chatradhari Singh and Basant Singh and Muslims like Sarfaraj Khan and Shaikh Ghulam Hussain[48]

Certain non tribals were spared in Chota Nagpur proper for example the artisans whose workmanship the rebels needed[49] Most of the blacksmiths and carpenters were detained in the vill ages for making arrows and forging heads to them and the bat tle axes[50] Some of them were also forced to participate in the violent deeds The cattle grazing *gwalas* were also spared but in one case a gwala suspected of spying was killed One weaver who demanded the price of his piece of cloth was also killed So was killed an oilman Bishambhar Teli The *Sonars* (goldsmiths) even though professionally useful to the rich people were not liked by the poor tribals whose womenfolk used beads conch shells etc as ornaments Hence they were not given any pro tection

All in all the insurrection of 1831 32 was a crude form of protest of the lower classes against the upper classes the have nots against the haves The huge casualties and the unprece dented loss of grains and other movable and even immovable property only show the terrible nature of this protest The lea ders like Buddhu Bhagat of Silligaon who died fighting Joa Bhagat of Jerra Kesho Bhagat of Gajuri Narendra Sah Manki of Silwaye and Madara Mahto of Murgu[51] were brave men with a good organising capacity Even so they did not succeed be cause their traditional arms could not face the modern weapons of the British army All the same they made great sacrifices for the cause of the freedom of their land

NOTES

1 E J Hobsbawm *Primitive Rebels* Manchester 1959 p 13

2 *Ibid* Soon after the Kol insurrection the neighbouring Jungle Mahals were convulsed by the Bhumij Revolt See the author s

The Kol insurrection of Chota Nagpur, Thacker, Spink & Co, Calcutta, 1964 and the *Bhumij Revolt*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1967 Also see Brian Crozier, *The Rebels* London, 1949, p 134 By rebelling they believed, they would improve their lot

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4 L S S O'Malley (ed), *Modern India and the West* London, 1941, p 737
5 J Master, Officiating Commissioner of Circuit Ramgarh, to Bengal Govt 17 Jan, 1833 Board's Collections (henceforth B C) 1502/58893, India Office Library, London
6 *The Bengal Hurkaru and Chronicle* 3 March, 1832
7 Major Sutherland's note, Bengal Judicial Consultations, 17 April, 1832
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12 *The India Gazette* 23 March, 1832
13 H P Russell Jungle Mahals Magistrate to W Braddon, Burdwan Commissioner, 18 April, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, 15 May, 1832, B C 1363/54226
14 Minute W Blunt, 4 April, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, 17 April, 1832, B C 1363/59227
15 *The India Gazette* 3 February, 1832, Editorial
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17 Houlton, op cit Also See *The Calcutta Review* Vol XXVI, January June 1856, p 253 on the similarities with the Santal insurrection.
18 *Man in India* Ranchi, Rebellion Number, Vol XXV, December, 1945 No 4
19 C Von Furer Haimendorf *ibid*
20 J Master, *op cit*
21 Minute, 30 March 1832 Beng Judl Cons 17 April 1832
22 Statement of Sahib Singh Subadar of the Ramgarh Battalion, 2 June, 1832 Appendix No 2, enclosure Dent's separate remarks 5 January, 1833 B C 1502/58891
23 J Master, *op cit* and Blunt's minute, 4 April, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, 17 April, 1832
24 Statement of Kunwar Harnath Sahi, 28 February, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, 17 April, 1832, B C 1363/54227
25 J Master to J F M Reid, Registrar, Court of Nizamat Adalat, 22 October, 1832, B C 1502/58893 The Thana of Jhikuchatti was the earliest to be attacked (Master to Macsween, 17 January, 1833, B C 1502/58893)
26 Beng Judl Cons, 3 June 1833

27 Statement of Harnath Sahi, *op cit*
28 Master to Macsween, *op cit* Biswanath Singh, an employee of the Maharaja, lost his son
29 Old Grundy' to Editor, *The India Gazette* 21 February, 1832
30 Statement of Singrai, a rebel leader, 18 April, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, 5 May, 1832, B C 1363/54228
31 According to the *Bengal Hurkaru* of 4 February, 1832, they sent a silver stick also If the villagers took the arrow they were plundered, but if they took the stick they joined as friends According to *India Gazette* 3 February, 1832, the arrows were poisoned
32 B C, 1363/54227
33 *The India Gazette* 4 February, 1832, Editorial
34 P', Camp Pitauria in Ch N, 5 March, 1832, Quoted in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, 13 March, 1832
35 *The India Gazette*, 22 February, 1832
36 *Bengal Hurkaru*, 10 March, 1832
37 E I U S Journal of February, 1832
38 Master to Reid, *op cit*
39 S C Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, p 223
40 'Insurrection of the Coles in Chotanagpur', *Bengal Past and Present* Vol LXII, Serial 125, January December 1942, p 78
41 Master s report of 25 September, 1832, B C 1362/54223
42 Sutherland to Govt, B C 1363/54227 Cf the cutting of limbs of Din Dayal Ray by the Santals with the remarks 'with these fingers you counted your interest and ill gotten wealth' With this hand you snatched away food from the mouths of the hungry poor' K K Datta *Santal Insurrection*, p 34
43 A correspondent, Camp Chatbhawani, to *Govt Gazette*, Calcutta, 23 February, 1832
44 Master to Reid, *op cit*
45 *Ibid*
46 *Ibid*
47 R Nevve to Joint Commissioner, Chota Nagpur 28 April, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, 29 May, 1832, B C 1363/54228
48 *Ibid*
49 Metcalfe, Minute, op cit
50 'Tee to tum' to Editor, *Bengal Hurkaru* 13 March 1832
51 Beng Judl Cons, 3 June, 1833 One gwala was forced to kill one Parashuram Beng Judl Cons, 3 June, 1833
52 More than 4 000 head of cattle were plundered by the Kols from the Tamar pargana alone Beng Judl Cons, 20 March, 1832
53 Ch Jt Commrs to J Thomas, 16 November, 1832, Beng Judl Cons, June, 1833

ABORIGINAL REBELLIONS IN THE DECCAN*

COUNT VON FURER-HAIMENDORF

Rebellions of aboriginal tribesmen against the authority of Government are among the most tragic conflicts between rulers and ruled Whatever course the clash may take, it is always a hopeless struggle of the weak against the strong, the simpleminded and uniformed against the organized resources of a powerful system There may be loss of life on both sides, but it is always the aboriginals who court ruin and economic distress I do not refer here to the risings of war-like frontier tribes risings which are often more in the nature of resistance to the establishment of Government's authority than a challenge to an existing administration, but to the rebellions of primitive aboriginal tribes of Peninsular India such as the Santal Rebellion in Bihar, the Bhil Rebellion in Khandesh and the Rampa Rebellion in the East Godavari District All these rebellions were defensive movements they were the last resort of tribesmen driven to despair by the encroachments of outsiders on their land or economic resources As such they could have all been avoided had the authorities recognized the aboriginals' grievances and taken steps to remedy them not as it happened in most cases after the rising, but before the pressure on the tribesmen had made an outbreak unavoidable Indeed any one with first hand experience of conditions in the backward areas and of the appalling oppression and exploitation to which many aboriginals are subjected at the hands of more advanced populations must be surprised, not by the occurrence of risings, but by the infrequency of violent reaction on the part of the aboriginals to the loss of their ancestral lands and to their economic enslavement If Nagas Chins, Daflas or Abors not to speak of the tribes of the North West Frontier were exposed to the injustices suffered by Gonds or Reddis,

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* Reprinted from *Man in India* Vol XXV 1945 (Ranchi) with the kind permission of Dr S Sinha, editor of *Man in India*

murder and violence would be the order of the day, but the tribes of Middle India and the Deccan are on the whole so gentle and inoffensive that extreme provocation is necessary before they take the law into their own hands

There are two main causes which in the past have led to armed risings of aboriginals the first is exploitation by money lenders, traders and contractors as well as by minor Government officials, the second the expropriation of the aboriginals' land by cultivators and land lords of more advanced communities or by Government in the course of the reservation of forests In the first case the responsibility of the administration lies in countenancing a state of affairs in which unscrupulous new comers can grow fat at the expense of the aboriginals, and in the second an active disregard of the tribesmen's rights on their ancestral land is added to the faults of a policy of *laissez faire* On the part of administrators has been in both cases ignorance and indifference rather than actual ill-will towards the aboriginals which prevented them from affording protection against oppression and recognizing their fundamental claim to the land on which they and their forefathers found their living

Two examples from the Deccan may illustrate this point The first is the so called Rampa Rebellion, a large-scale insurrection of the Hill Reddis of the East Godavari District and the second a recent case of local defiance of the authority of Government by several hundred Gonds in the Adilabad District of Hyderabad

The Hill Reddis are a tribe of primitive shifting cultivators inhabiting the Eastern Ghats to both sides of the Godavari gorge[1] Scattered over the hills, in small family-groups possessing no other economic resources than the produce of the jungles and the fruits of their hill fields that are worked only with axe and digging stick, and evincing, very little tribal cohesion, they strike one as timid and inoffensive, a people with no other wish than to be left alone in the enjoyment of their forests Yet in the Rampa Rebellion these same Reddis proved tenacious and resourceful fighter, whom to subdue required several regiments of regular troops

What were the causes for that outbreak of violence? At the time of the cession of the Northern Circars to the East India Company the Rampa country, which falls now within the Choda-Varam Taluq was found in the possession of a ruling chief al-

ternatively styled zamindar *mansabdar* or raja The earliest re cords describe the Rampa Zamindar as a ruler as independent as the Raja of Bastar and though he was himself not a Reddi the hereditary chieftains or *muttadar* of the Hill Reddis recog nized him as their feudal lord How the Rampa *mansabdar* or- ginally gained possession of the country and by what means they succeeded in controlling the independent and elusive hill peo ple is not known but whatever power they wielded they concen trated on the extraction of tribute and did not interfere with the internal affairs of the Reddis

At the time of the revenue settlement of 1802 03 the Rampa country seems to have been entirely disregarded as if it had not existed and no settlement of any part was made Subsequently the *mansabdar* Ram Bhupati Devu is reported to have seized some villages in the plains but was driven from them and made to acknowledge for ever the sovereignty of the Company' In 1813 A D a settlement was made with Ram Bhupati Devu for the first time The villages he had taken were restored to him as *mokhasas*[3] and along with his ancestral possessions in the hills were confirmed to him free of peshkash[4] on condition that he maintained order in them and prevented incursions into the low country He appears to have leased his villages to certain subordi nate hill chiefs or *muttadars*[5] whom he required to keep order in their own charges and from whom he received an income of Rs 8 750 per annum These were the ancestors of the present *mutta dars*

Ram Bhupati Devu died leaving no legitimate male heir and was succeeded by his daughter But after years of disturbances of various kinds she surrendered the estate in favour of her illegi timate half brother

In 1848 after protracted negotiations the *muttadars* agreed to accept this man as *mansabdar* and to perform their old police duties on condition that their united quit rents should not exceed Rs 1 000 and that the *mansabdar* should never attempt to exact more from them

The *mansabdar* agreed to this but quickly broke his promise His confiscations of *muttas* and oppression of the people resulted in risings against his authority in 1859 and 1861 and such was the hatred he inspired that when in 1862 he attempted to go and re-

side in his property an insurrection arose which had to be put down by a strong force of police He continued his depredations, however, and by 1879 has succeeded in getting eight *muttas* into his own enjoyment, had doubled the quit-rent in several others and was deriving a considerable revenue from taxes on fuel and grazing and other unauthorised cesses

He succeeded in doing this largely by making to appear, some times by disgraceful devices that all his actions had the sanction of Government, and some of the *muttadars* who complained of the *mansabdar* s exactions were referred to the Civil Courts, though the hillmen are notorious for their dread of the plains The growing, discontent among the people was increased by new *abkari* regulations preventing the drawing of toddy for domestic purposes and leasing the toddy revenue to renters These renters demanded that the *muttadars* should pay fees (called *chigurupannu*) for the right to tap toddy and the *mansabdar* threatened to levy an additional tax called *modalupannu* at the rate of one-half of two thirds of the *chigurupannu*

This was the last straw and was the immediate cause of the Rampa Rebellion of 1879 The unpopularity of the police who had assisted in introducing the new toddy rules and also oppressed the people on their own account was a contributory cause The people said that 'they could not stand all the taxes that were being imposed that three years ago came the *chigurupannu* that this year the *mansabdar* was demanding *modalupannu* that the constables were extorting fowls and that they could not live they might as well kill the constables and die' The operation of the civil law of the country was an additional grievance Traders from the low country had taken advantage of the simplicity of the hillmen 'who would much sooner walk into a tiger's den than put in an appearance in the Rajahmundry court' to make unfair contracts with them and then if these were not fulfilled according to the trader s own interpretation to file suits against them obtain *ex parte* decrees, and distrain as much of their property as they could lay hands on In satisfaction of a debt of Rs 5 cattle and produce worth Rs 100 had sometimes been carried off in this manner, and sometimes, it was said, the formality of a suit was dispensed with, and the trader accompanied by a friend personating an officer of the court made the distraint without any authority whatever The hill-people laid the blame of this injustice

on Government and Government rules and regulations and thought that their only remedy lay in rising against the authorities

The actual course of the rebellion is here of secondary interest and a short outline will suffice The ringleaders were Chandraya of Lagaraya Sambaya of Kutravada Thamman Dora of Bhupatipalem and Amboi Reddi of Budduluru Samabaya was apparently the grandfather of Pulikanta Sambaya the present *muttadar* of Kutravada who is not of Reddi but of Jangam caste and who told me that his grandfather had been the guru of the local *muttadar* and had died in jail where he had been confined for taking part in the rebellion and inflamming the insurgents with his prophecies Thamman Dora was probably a Koya for Kovas describe themselves in these parts as Koya Doras and today a number of *muttadar* on the vicinity of Rampa are not Reddis but Kovas

The first outbreak of the rebellion occurred in March 1879 when six policemen were captured by disaffected tribesmen under Thamman Dora near Boduluru a village 22 miles north of Chodavaram, and kept in custody for several days Then they were taken to Kodigandi where under a tamarind tree Thamman Dora with his own hands severed the heads of the head-constable and one constable as a sacrifice in the presence of 200 of his followers[6] Later the rebels attacked the Chodavaram police station and succeeded in burning the police station at Addatigala the headquarters of the Ellavaram Taluq Soon the whole Rampa country was ablaze and the rebellion assumed serious proportions

In the next month (April) the disturbance spread to the Golconda hills of Vizagapatnam and in July to the Rekapalli country in Bhadrachalam but the causes of the disaffection there were essentially different from those operating in Rampa itself

In Rekapalli when under the Central Provinces administration, *podu* (*i e* shifting) cultivation had been almost unrestricted and the assessment on it had been only four annas an axe But when this area was transferred in 1863 the Madras Government almost trebled the assessment, excluded the cultivators from certain tracts, and levied a tax on the felling of certain species of reserved trees These new taxes and restrictions were considered a grievance and it was for this reason that the Rampa leaders found adherents in the Rekapalli country

'The disturbed area now comprised over 5,000 square miles of wooded and hilly country The operations of the troops were much hampered by the nature of the ground, and the malcontents took advantage of their superior knowledge of the country to maintain a harassing guerilla warfare, avoiding all direct encounters with the troops, but attacking isolated police stations and burning or looting the villages of those who assisted the authorities Troops were hastened up to the country, and by the end of 1879 the Government forces included besides several hundred police drafted from neighbouring districts, as many as six regiments of Madras infantry two companies of a sappers and miners and a squadron of cavalry and a wing of infantry from the Hyderabad contingent'

Though in Rampa quiet was restored in August 1879, in other areas the rebellion was not entirely suppressed until November 1880 The *mansabdar* of Rampa was deposed and Government made the settlement with the individual *muttadar* direct

From our point of view the history of the Rampa Rebellion is important in two respects it shows firstly that aboriginals, even if inherently not of a warlike character are capable of considerable efforts when driven to extremities, and secondly that it is both inexpedient and dangerous to allow the control and exploitation of aboriginal populations to fall into the hands of unscrupulous and unsupervized outsiders, who although not directly responsible to Government, are backed by the authority of the police and the law courts For while the outsiders understand how to use the laws of the land to their own advantage and are assisted in their designs by the aboriginal's dread of contact with the police the aboriginals are in the unenviable position that any use of force, which is the only means in their power to free themselves from the oppression of their exploiters, brings them into conflict with the authority of the State

In the East Godavari Agency the conditions of the aboriginals has considerably improved since the times of the Rampa Rebellion The necessity of devising special methods for administering primitive populations was then forcefully brought before the eyes of the authorities and steps have been taken to protect the aboriginals from the encroachment of outsiders and to fortify them through education for competition with other sections of the population

Whereas the Rampa Rebellion was caused by the inaction of the authorities in the face of the exploitation of the aboriginals by outsiders rather than by any positive action on the part of Government, a rising of Gonds and Kolams in the Adilabad District of Hyderabad in 1940 was due to a Land and Forest Policy which ran directly counter to the needs and legitimate rights of the aboriginal tribesmen Like every other tribal insurrection it must be viewed against the background of the general economic conditions'

Until less than a hundred years ago the greater part of the Adilabad District was a country rich in forest, poor in communications, and of little economic and political importance It was inhabited mainly by Gonds and by the more primitive tribe of Kolams A feudal system prevailed then among the Gonds, who, while recognizing the sovereignty of the Nizam, lived to all practical purposes under the jurisdiction of their tribal heads At that time they were not only the ruling race, but the principal holders and cultivators of the land The administration established by the Nizam s Government did not at first affect conditions among the bulk of the aboriginal population but a radical change in the position occurred when with the improvement of communications advanced populations of Telugu and Maratha stock flooded the District both from the south and the north and occupied such lands as had become easy of access Ignorant of the laws of the State, and in many cases of the language both of the administration and of the new comers, and unfamiliar with revenue procedure, many Gonds then lost their holdings to immigrant cultivators and whole Gond villages fell into the hands of absentee landlords The latter managed their villages as commercial enterprises and as they had naturally an interest to settle good cultivators, they encouraged the immigration of non aboriginals and gradually replaced their Gond tenants whose agricultural methods were comparatively backward by more experienced cultivators capable of paying higher rents Until 1945 Hyderabad had no tenancy act and in the absence of a settlement landlords could raise the rents at their discretion, this process assumed in recent times dangerous proportions and every year Gonds were ousted from villages where their families had lived for generations

Whereas in the plains and valleys many Gonds were driven from their lands by economically more powerful new comers,

those in the hills were faced by an equally drastic curtailment of their rights resulting from the introduction of forest conservancy Until as late as fifty years ago the aboriginals of the hills were subject to no restrictions in the choice of land for cultivation The Kolams and Naikpods practised shifting cultivation on hill sides and the Gonds of most villages cultivated mainly the light soils of gentle slopes hill tops in more or less regular rotation Th s system came to an end however when forest lines were drawn round the villages which were thus established as en claves within the reserved forest The general idea in this demar cation of forest lines was to extend the reserved forest over all those areas which were not actually under cultivation Thereby a great deal of land which had in former years been cultivated in rotation and which at the time of the demarcation was lying fallow was included in the reserve and the aboriginals were deprived of its future use

But enclaves were established only where at least part of the cultivated land was held on *patta* Villages where the Gonds had no such occupancy rights were completely included in the re served forest and the inhabitants given a time limit to evacuate the village lands In pursuance of this forest policy the autho rities enforced the disbandment of many villages that had been inhabited for generations and the Gonds and Kolams exp lled from their ancestral lands had no other choice but to seek a living by working for non aboriginal landlords

The bitterness created among the aborig nals by the alienation of their land in the plains and their expulsion from many tracts in the hills was sharpened by many petty tyrannies and exac tions on the part of Forest and Police subordinates and in 1940 their disaffection had reached a stage where only a spark was needed to set ablaze the smouldering resentment and despair This spark was provided by the forcible disbandment of a group of Gond and Kolam settlements in the Dhanora State Forest and for the first time in their unequal struggle against the ruth lessness of non aboriginal landlords and the indifference of offi cials to their needs did the Gonds find a leader capable of rally ing hundreds of tribesmen to concerted act on

This leader was Kumra Bhimu and the story of his repeated and unsuccessful attempts to contact the District Officers and

to enlist their sympathy for the aboriginals difficulties makes sad reading Kumra Bhimu s home village was Sankepalli, about five miles from Asifabad and it was in that area that in recent years practically all the aboriginals' land had fallen into the hands of absentee landlords and that most Gonds had been displaced by immigrant cultivators Bhimu, who was of more than usual intelligence and could read and write was not content to exist precariously as an agricultural labourer and having failed to establish himself as tenant in the villages of non aboriginal landlords he left the plains and settled at Babujheri a hill village of a dozen Gond houses and some fifty Kolam and Naikpod houses scattered in small hamlets round the main settlement But when the boundaries of the Dhanora State Forest were demarcated, Babujheri like many other villages, was not established as an enclave and the inhabitants, none of whom had *patta* rights were told that they must evacuate the village When by the fixed date they had not left all their houses were burnt by forest guards Many Kolams and Naikpods dispersed and moved into the neighbouring *taluq* but the Gonds and nine households of Kolams applied for permission to settle at Jhoreghat a site at no great distance from Babujheri The minor revenue officials raised no objection but the forester and forest guards used the opportunity to extract from the Gonds several hundred rupees under the threat that unless they paid Jhoreghat, just as Babujheri would be burnt Having satisfied these demands of the forest subordinates the Gonds started clearing the land for cultivation, but when after a short time they were faced with new exactions Bhimu and four other Gonds went to Hyderabad in the hope of obtaining permission to remain at Jhoreghat In the capital they did not know where to apply but it seems that in some office or other they were given a document which they took to be the required permission Great was therefore their disappointment when the local Forest authorities still insisted on the evacuation of Jhoreghat The initial payments to forest subordinates and the journey to Hyderabad had exhausted their credit and all their resources and to leave Jhoreghat meant complete economic ruin They refused to move and Bhimu sent once more written petitions to the Forest and Revenue Officers of the District But these petitions had no effect and the Forest Ranger sent a party of forest guard reinforced by an armed Arab to effect the eva-

cuation of the Jhoreghat This party started by burning without warning some of the outlying settlements and when the Gonds enraged by the burning of their houses opposed them the Arab shot at Bhimu and wounded him in the hand At this the assembled Gonds fell upon the party beat the forest guards and forced them to make a hasty retreat

The Gonds and Kolams had no illusions as to the seriousness of the situation They knew that their triumph would be short lived and that their arrest and the destruction of their village could be only a matter of days But Bhimu decided that this time they would not yield and he succeeded in persuading several hundred malcontent Gonds and Kolams to support him in resisting the disbandment of Jhoreghat The news of his decision to brave the Forest authorities who in recent years had rendered homeless and destitute thousands of Gonds and Kolams by expelling them from their ancestral land spread like wild fire through the hills and men who had nothing to lose and were burning with resentment against a policy which deprived Gonds and Kolams of their land while enabling wealthy new comers to establish themselves in all the fertile valleys and plains rallied in hundreds to Bhimu s cause Their belief in his leadership was strengthened by his claim to supernatural powers Like many Gond *bhaktal* or seers men capable of trance experiences and liable to possession by gods Bhimu was credited with the faculty of hearing the voices of deities and to act under their guidance But this alone would not have enabled him to rouse hundreds of peaceful cultivators against the authority of the State if the aboriginals temper had not already been near boiling point Rumours current among the non aboriginals of the District had it that he intended to found a Gond Raj but this is not borne out either by the accounts of his Gond followers nor by the letters which he continued to address to the authorities In these he demanded only permission to live and cultivate at Jhoreghat and freedom from the exactions of forest subordinates and from plough tax and grazing fees whose collection had been used as a pretext for all sorts of illegal extortions of cash and provisions

Unfortunately no responsible officer contacted Bhimu and the Gonds collected at Jhoreghat at the time when they were still sending written messages and when at last the Taluqdar as the head of the District approached Bhimu s hill redoubt with a

large police force, the Gonds were partly too excited and partly, no doubt, too frightened to state their grievances in direct negotiations Messengers, themselves probably in a state of excitement and fear, went backwards and forwards between the two camps but the Taluqdar s demand that Bhimu and his followers should give themselves up to the police was met by the counter-demand that the Gonds and Kolams should be left in undisturbed possession of Jhoreghat and the land they had begun to cultivate There can be no doubt that even then any person enjoying the confidence of the aboriginals could have avoided a clash, but such a person did not exist, for the District officers had very little contact with and even less knowledge of the Gonds and Kolams

By the time the Government party advanced on the hill where Bhimu had collected his followers, the Gonds had worked themselves into a frenzy and stood firm brandishing swords and ceremonial spears Bhimu, who believed himself impervious to bullets, was obviously in a state of extreme excitement and no longer amenable to reason A shot fell from the crowd of Gonds but hit no one Then the police opened fire and killed Bhimu and ten other Gonds on the spot Many more were wounded and the rest was partly arrested and partly dispersed

Thus ended the short-lived insurrection of the Adilabad Gonds and when a year later I came to the district, I found the aboriginals in a state of unrelieved gloom and frustration They realised that any opposition to Government must lead to disaster but saw no hope of averting the collapse of tribal economy and freedom threatened alike by a rigorous Forest policy and the encroachment of rapacious immigrants backed by the full force of the State

Fortunately the picture has changed since then In a number of reports, now available in print, I was able to draw the attention of H E H the Nizams Government to the deplorable condition of the aboriginals and to suggest measures for administrative reform and a liberalization of Forest policy Many of these suggestions have been adopted and Government provided the funds for a Gond Education Scheme which is to enable the Gonds to safeguard their own interests * The extent to which the Hyderabad Government has recently revised its policy vis-a-vis

the aboriginals and thereby removed many of the causes that led to the Gond Rebellion in 1940 may be judged from a quotation from the Foreward to *Tribal Hyderabad* by W V Grigson, C S I, I C S Revenue and Police Member of H E H the Nizam's Executive Council In the Adilabad District there has been a partial overhaul of the administrative personnel Special Officer for the aboriginal areas with headquarters at Marlavai in Utnur Taluq has been appointed and a decision come to in regard to areas to be retained as forest or leased for distribution among the aboriginal cultivators in *patta* right, already *pattas* have been granted for many thousand of acres Above all the work of establishing a training centre for aboriginal teachers at Marlavai and basing upon it a network of aboriginal schools is expanding rapidly Marlavai has even turned out roughly trained Gonds able to work as *gumashta patwaris*, and with the appointment also by the Inspector General of Forests of some aboriginals as forest watchers and guards the aboriginal has begun to think that the Government may be his Government after all There is at least a new spirit of hope in the district

Thus Bhimu and his followers have not died in vain The affray at Jhoreghat and the subsequent investigations into the causes of the Gonds' dissatisfaction have made it clear that the position of the aboriginals in Adilabad constitute a major problem There had never been any deliberate and conscious oppression of aboriginals on the part of H E H the Nizam's Government but, owing to the lack of information on the backward areas of the State, the local exploiter and bully and the irresponsible and narrow minded petty official had remained in practically supreme control Unvocal and uneducated as they were, the aboriginals had no means of bringing their grievances to the notice of Government and all those who profited from their exploitation—absentee landlords *patwaris* and Forest and Police subordinates—succeeded to only too well in erecting a screen which prevented even the higher District officers from realizing the plight of the autochthonous tribesmen This unhappy state of affairs has now come to an end and while to day the aboriginal needs still protection and guidance by enlightened officers of Government, *it is hoped that tomorrow he will be able to meet the* other communities of H E H the Nizam s Dominions on equal terms

NOTES

1 For a description of Reddi economics see my article Primitive Aboriginal Cultures in the Deccan *Man in India* Vol XXIV (1944) pp 126 8

2 *Gazetteer of the East Godavari District* 1907 p 272 The following quotations in inverted commas are all from this Gazetteer pp 272 4 unless otherwise indicated

3 *Mokhasas* are villages leased out by Government against a fixed revenue

4 *Peshkash* is the fixed land revenue payable to Government by estate owners

5 *Muttadars* are ordinarily owners of estates auctioned by Government but here the term is used for the Hill Reddi chieftains who paid tribute to the *mansabdar*

6 M R Rv Seshagiri Rao Avargal *Notes on the Rampa Agency East Godavari District* (Madras 1931) p 11

7 A detailed account of the aboriginal problem in the Adilabad District is contained in my reports published under the title *Tribal Hyderabad* by the Revenue Department Government H E H the Nizam (Hyderabad 1945)

8 The principles which I followed in the organization of the Gond Education Scheme are outlined in my article Aboriginal Education in Hyderabad *The Indian Journal of Social Work* Vol V (1944) No 2

THE BHEEL RISING (1857-58)

CHITRALEKHA BHATTACHARYA

The Bheels were a section of the backward and warlike community of Central India, scattered mostly in the Western Ghats Their chief stronghold was in Khandesh Already in the first half of the 19th century, between 1817 and 1825, they had taken up arms against the British Raj, then represented by the East India Company, on several occasions

They were quickly stirred by the news of the rebellion against the East India Company in the North in 1857 The Bheel leaders received 'Purwanhahs either direct from the king of Delhi or from some high authority in that city directing them to rise in rebellion against the British Government"[1] Bheema Naik the famous Bheel leader, even issued proclamations to the Khandesh Police to the effect that he was acting under the authority of the King of Delhi and threatened them if they remained faithful to Government"

Thus inspired by the risings in the North and fortified by the purwannahs from the king of Delhi the Bheels under the leadership of Kajee Singh, Bhagoji Naik and others raised the standard of rebellion and directed their attack on the British Government in Khandesh

From the Government records of the Bombay Presidency it is amply evident that these attacks included plundering of villages even within six miles of Khandesh and looting of carts containing seven lakhs of treasures

On more than one occasion there were actual battles between the Bheels and the military force of the East India Company in Khandesh The Bheels carried on their military operations mostly from the hills Most important was the Battle of Amba Pani (April 11, 1857) The Bheel chiefs Bheema Naik and Mowassia Naik along with Kajee Singh, Daulat Singh and Kaloo Bhawa

with three thousand followers consisting of Bheels and Mackranees took up their stand on the summit of a narrow and steep range of hills The tops of these hills were crowned with rocks and large stones which acted as excellent cover The battle bagan at 8 a m on the 11th April 1857 and continued till 3 30 p m From the accounts of the British Officers it is known that the Bheels offered a most determined resistance and 'fought with desperation" They succeeded in inflicting serious wounds on Captain Birch and Lieutenant Basevi One native officer of the 9th Regiment, according to the Government Report, was killed 460 Bheel women and children were taken as prisoners Among them were the wives of Kajee Singh and Mowassia Naik The niece of Bheema Naik was also caught while Kajee Singh s only son Polad Singh, was killed This battle, however could not break the spirit of the Bheels since the Nagar Bheels rose against the British[3] On the 20th January, 1858 about 400 Bheels took a strong position in the bed of a river under cover of thick bushes and trees on the borders of Khandesh and Nugar Collectorate From this advantageous position they began their battle against the British forces led by Lieutenant Stuart Captain Montgomery, Thatcher and Lieutenant Fairborther Captain Montgomery was wounded in the first attack When Lieutenants Chamberlayne, Davidson and Stuart were wounded the British forces withdrew Later Lieutenant Stuart died

In his minute[4] Elphinstone clearly stated that the efforts of the local authorities in Khandesh and Ahmednagar aided in the latter collectorate by the dispatch of troops from Bombay and Poona have hitherto failed to put down Bheel risings"

Because of the military failure of the British suppressing the Bheel risings, Mansfield the District Magistrate of Khandesh, granted unconditional pardon to Kajee Singh who dismissed his followers[5] He also arranged to meet other Naiks at Dhoolia who dismissed their followers They were also granted unconditional pardon Bheel Naik Puttogee surrendered to the British while Bhagojee died fighting in front of the village Nandoor Suigotch[6]

The Bheel risings (Sept 1857 to 1858) constitute a glorious phase of the armed resistance offered to the British colonial rule in India It has several other interesting features In the first place, the Bheel risings were mass risings in the true sense of the term

More than 2000 Bheels under the leadership of six Naiks united in the neighbourhood of Khandesh alone Almost an equal number of Bheels united against the British in and around Sindwa Ghat In the battle of Amba Pani (11th April 1857) alone more than 460 women and children were taken prisoners[8] Thus it is evident that the entire Bheel population of the hills took up arms against the British

Secondly it is interesting to note that the Bheel women shared the responsibility of fighting against the British equally with their menfolk and fought side by side with them The Commissioner of Police in a letter to the Secretary to the Government Secret Department Bombay on 1st June 1858 commented that Bheel women were just as troublesome and mischievous as their men In fact the women played a vital role in the anti British Bheel risings by obtaining information and supplying it to the men In general they had great influence on Bheel males As a result the British adopted the policy of holding Bheel women as hostages till Bheel Naiks could be captured[9]

Thirdly the Bheel risings were often supported by the local rulers In his letter[9] to H L Anderson Secretary to Government Bombay Samuel Mansfield the Magistrate of Khandesh wrote the want of energy displayed by His Highness the Holkar's officials at Sindwa to protect traffic and disperse the Bheels is so great that the only inference to be drawn is that they render *assistance to Kajee Singh and other Bheel Naiks In fact hun*dreds of opium carts were detained at Sindwa to pay toll to Kajee Singh but Holkar's officials did nothing to capture Kajee Singh or to protect opium Bheema and Mowassia Naiks were amply helped by the Raja of Burwanee who the British alleged sent large quantities of supplies to the hills[4] In his minute Elphinstone recorded his impression that a large number of Holkar's mutinous troops at Indore and in its neighbourhood along with Jhansi and Kota rebels and other discontented people found friends and sympathisers in Sindwa and its neighbourhood Though he made no direct mention of the Bheels it may be assumed that the Bheels were encouraged by the above mentioned to rise in arms against the British

Fourthly any discussion on Bheel risings would remain incomplete without reference to the courage leadership and organising

capacity of leaders like Kajee Singh Bheema Naik and others Often more than thousand Bheels attacked the British forces, equipped with modern weapons so successfully that the British had to give up fighting The unique organising capacity of the Bheel Naiks is evident from the fact that the entire Bheel population inclusive of children and women were inspired to resist the British

NOTES

1 Extracts from a letter from Major Haselwood Supdtt of Police and Political Assistant to the Collector to S Mansfield Magistrate of Khandesh 5th May, 1858 No 270 of 1858

2 Letter No 52 of 1857 from Commissioner of Police to Secretary to Government, Secret Department 28th Sept, 1857 Poona

3 Letter No 144 of 1858 from S Mansfield Magistrate of Khandesh to H L Anderson Secretary to Govt, Secret Dept Bombay, 25th January 1858, pp 539 544 vol 21 of 1858

4 Pp 285-295, No 6511 P D Vol 24 of 1858

5 P D Vol 33 of 1858 pp 349 362 Letter No 1340 of 1858, dated 31st July 1858

6 P D Vol 28 of 1858 Summary of Report of Lieutenant Thatcher Asstt Supdtt of Police

7 *Ibid*

8 P D Vol 26 of 1858 pp 9-13

9 P D Vol 29 of 1858 pp 657 665 Serial No 104 of 1858

10 P D Vol 32 of 1857 pp 77 to 81 letter dated 30th November, 1857, Serial No 1957 of 1858

11 Pp 673 680, P D Vol 25 of 1858

12 P D Vol 24 of 1858, pp 9 11

GENERAL REFERENCE

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INDIGO REBELLION (1859 61)

NANDINI SEN

The Great Rebellion (1857) of the Indian people had hardly been suppressed when the indigo ryots of Bengal raised the banner of their revolt On the eve of the sowing season of 1859, all on a sudden, they unanimously determined to sow indigo no more In this revolt the initiative came from the peasants of Barasat who had a long and glorious tradition of stubborn resistance against the indigo planters since the very beginning of their settlement in Bengal The main centre of this uprising during the years 1859 61 was the district of Nadia It gradually spread to the outlying districts of Jessore, Khulna, Murshidabad and Maldah At the time of Indigo revolt, next to Nadia only Jessore remained to be the scene of widespread peasant activities and popular excitement The conflagration of indigo rebellion started at the beginning of 1859 reached its zenith during the spring of 1860 and continued even after 1861

In Bengal the cultivation of indigo was introduced by the European planters during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and in India English owned capital was invested for the first time in this industry Indigo once constituted the main article in the export trade of the English East India Company Later on the Company left the business in the hands of the private European traders At that time it was a very profitable business In England, with the growth of textile industries, the demand for indigo also increased very much as it was needed for dyeing the cloth That demand of the British capitalists was met by the indigo planters who used to appropriate a huge sum of profit from this industry One pound of indigo sold in the market of England at Rs 5 to Rs 7 used to be purchased at Calcutta at Re 1 and annas 4 only But it should be remembered that while the plantation of indigo meant for the European planters a source of such a fabulous profit, for the Bengali cultivators it was nothing but one of untold misery,

unlimited exploitation and violent oppression Indeed the system of indigo cultivation was, in fact, nothing but a thinly veiled slavery" and from the very first day of its introduction here it gave birth to a 'reign of terror in the village life of Bengal

In Bengal as revealed before the Indigo Commission most of the indigo cultivation was carried on by ryoti system better known as *dadni* system Under this system the cultivation was practically carried on by the ryot in his own land and at his own risk He was supplied with or rather was forced to take an advance at the rate of Rs 2/- per bigah from the planter The ryot had to enter into a contract with the planter regarding the *measurement of land to be cultivated rate of price of the indigo* plant etc According to the system of contract, the ryot had to bear not only the entire risk and responsibility of the cultivation, but he was also responsible even after reaping the crop to cart it to the planter's factory at his own cost Practically the system did not require year by year capital investment because the debt of a ryot, who had ever touched the money of advance was never paid off to the factory even if he had the capacity to pay off he was not allowed to do so and the debt, mounting year after year, would continue and extend to the next generation Moreover, an indigo ryot was practically obliged to sow indigo even for the succeeding owner of the factory As the Indigo Commission remarked 'Once a ryot took advance he was never afterwards a free man" The ryots were purposely deceived by the planters through false measurement of land As a result as revealed before the Indigo Commission the amount received by a ryot, if at all due from a bigah's cultivation of indigo was only Rs 2/ and annas eight from which again a heavy amount was to be deducted towards fines for cattle trespassing and so many dues of the factory amlahs while the net profit the planter gained was Rs 6 and annas 8 Moreover, the cultivation of indigo was as laborious as it was time consuming and its sowing season in Bengal clashed with that of rice which was to the peasants far more profitable than indigo So for a ryot the cultivation of indigo meant economically a sheer loss and morally a bondage Thus in Bengal the indigo planters by giving an advance of only Rs 2/- per bigah of land could easily turn the ryots (i e cultivators possessing rights over land) virtually into serfs and

they themselves thrived on the staggering impoverishment of the peasants

Needless to say, such an exploiting system could be carried on only by unlimited extortion and violent oppression So in the indigo districts of Bengal, village life became insufferably vicious with the numerous cases of 'murder, homicide, riot, arson, dacoity, plunder and kidnapping" The planters could carry on those violent activities, because of the fact that the interests of the foreign rulers of the country did not differ in any way from those of the indigo planters The foreign rulers of India were quite aware of their precarious position in a conquered land like India where from the very beginning of their rule they had to face continuous challenge of mass resistance which often proved to be a great threat to their very existence So in addition to its economic interests, the colonial Government of India out of a political motive, always encouraged and patronised these planters to come and settle down among the masses in the interior of the country

It appears that from the very beginning the colonial Government was quite aware of the fact that the planters were in the habit of gross misuse of their powers As early as in 1810 the licences of four indigo planters previously granted to them to reside in the interior of the country had to be withdrawn on account of their ill behaviour with the ryots Yet the Government of India gave the indigo planters such concessions as to arm them with the power to continue those lawless and violent activities more extensively All along the major concern of these planters was to achieve complete hold upon the peasants Regulation VIII of 1819, which entitled the planters to purchase *putni* taluks, was the beginning of the process through which the Government helped them to tighten up their grip upon their ryots Next came Regulation VI of 1823 which allowed them the right to recover advances with interest by a summary suit on any crops produced on the land for which he had given indigo advances Regulation V of 1830 authorised summary criminal trials and imprisonment of ryots who broke indigo contracts Since then the inhuman oppression and exploitation practised by the indigo planters knew no bounds Now practically they became the veritable rulers of their ryots The Charter Act of 1833 best served their interests

In the first half of the nineteenth century it was the sole policy of the rising industrial capitalists of England to develop India as a source of cheap raw materials required for the industrial revolution then going on in England In view of this policy the Charter Act of 1833 permitted the English planters to acquire land and settle down in India in order to develop the production and the export of raw materials from India Accordingly in 1837 facilities were created for the Indigo planters to purchase zamindari To serve their interests well in 1841 and in 1845, the Government passed Sale Laws by which the new purchaser (i e expectedly indigo planter) could enhance rents of all under tenants and eject tenants Soon these laws provided the indigo planters with a sharp weapon to use against their unwilling ryots During the great uprising of the Indian people (1857) in Bengal a large number of planters were invested with powers of honorary Magistrates So the power and influence these planters held upon the public life in rural Bengal could be easily imagined In criminal matters the planters being Europeans were already exempted from the jurisdiction of any Court below that of the District Magistrate In those days particularly in rural Bengal law courts were too few and located in a scattered manner so neither the planters nor their Indian agents could easily be sued The system of police was also vitiated by corruption Truly speaking the police lay within the clutches of the planters Most of the Magistrates were Europeans having close social ties with the indigo planters

Yet it would be a great mistake to suppose that the helpless poor peasants reconciled themselves to this state of affairs without any protest In 1859 for the first time they rose in revolt against the planters The stand taken by the ryots against the indigo planters was gradually transformed from one of defensive to offensive operations There are evidences of numerous clashes even before 1859 In 1831 one such battle of the peasants led by the famous Wahabi peasant leader Titu Mir was fought near Narkelberia in the sub division of Barasat not far from Calcutta The revolt under Titu Mir proved to be so formidable that in order to crush it the Government had to send from Calcutta an entire contingent of armed forces But the stubborn resistance which came from the combinations of indigo ryots between

1859 and 1861 assumed an unprecedented dimension in its extent and intensity Despite the fact that police and military forces were sent and the most repressive Act was passed to crush their movement, the peasants remained undaunted The movement proved to be a great blow at the root of the indigo system in Bengal The system of signing coercive contracts had to be abolished and consequently the planters had to pack up their business of indigo from Bengal for ever

The indigo revolt of 1859 60 very significantly came almost on the heels of the great rebellion in 1857-58 and set before the Indian people a new concept of resistance The leaders of the rebel peasants often used the names such as Nana Saheb and Tantia Topi, heroes of the Great Revolt of 1857-58 During this period, when there was much apprehension of an imminent peasant uprising in Bengal, the authorities, as a preventive measure put Dudu Mian, the famous Feraizi peasant leader of the day, in prison Soon after the revolt had been completely suppressed the indigo cultivators of Bengal again burst into a violent revolt which posed to the colonial Government a question of great political bearing

The movement had three distinctive phases As early as April, 1859 a general disinclination among the ryots to cultivate indigo was quite noticeable in the sub division of Barasat This general disinclination among the peasants soon spread throughout the extensive indigo cultivating regions of Bengal By the autumn of 1859, in sowing season the peasants of Nadia Murshidabad and Pabna had refused unanimously to sow indigo At the same time these peasants sought to draw the attention of the Government to the numerous oppressions practised by the indigo planters through mass petitions Thus in August 1859 when J P Grant, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was on his way through river from Calcutta to Pabna, he found from dawn to dusk that both banks of the rivers for 60 or 70 miles were literally lined with mammoth gatherings of people who came from river side villages Their "whole prayer was for an order of Government that they should not cultivate indigo'

But when their movement through mass petitions failed, they took to inter-village combination on a gigantic scale, until indigo

cultivation was virtually wiped out from Bengal The provocative measures like armed attack by the hired clubmen of planters were severely repulsed by the villagers In this they showed their marvellous capacity for prompt action and resourcefulness Side by side with the methods of mass non-cooperation they used the weapon of social boycott, better known as *hookah-pani-bandh* which made their combinations invincible The rebel ryots frequently coerced factory servants into leaving the planter by stopping all the services he needed to live Many planters were thereby forced into deserting their factories and they complained of the shortage of staff Villagers also co-operated in refusing to bid at auction for decreed property of a ryot The unanimity of the ryots made it impossible for the planters to obtain witness for any type of suit In an indigo case even the village Chowkidar refused to co operate with the police

During the spring time of 1860, as the indigo revolt reached its peak, at the request of the indigo planters the Government introduced provocative measures like the use of military police and the enactment of the repressive Act XI of 1860 But the peasants became all the more resolute and there were violent outbursts in some of the indigo districts Hundreds of ryots armed with clubs, spears and swords made attacks on indigo factories, police stations and collectorates They destroyed factory records, particularly factory ledgers, burnt down indigo seeds and destroyed indigo plants on the field Sometimes they forced the planter to come to compromise with them They often successfully encountered police force, showered them well with spears clods and bamboos and forced them to retreat The rebel peasants came out into open revolt

With the execution of Act XI of 1860 empowering the magistrates to enforce planters' demand upon the ryots by arrest, torture and imprisonment, hundreds and thousands of ryots had been arrested and involved in law suits as they were charged with false claims made by the planters Most of them became impoverished as they were compelled to sell their lands and cattle to pay off their fines or remained in prison How resolute they remained was revealed in the evidence they gave before the Indigo Commission (1860) One by one they came and told before the Commission that they would not sow indigo, even if

their throats were cut, or they would rather go to a country where the indigo plant was never seen or heard of, or rather they would go to another country where they would beg, or they would sow indigo for nobody, not even for their parents

On the expiration of Act XI, the planters began to threaten the ryots with rent enhancement or eviction To this new challenge the rebel ryots responded with a policy of no rent at all The crisis assumed such a magnitude that on March 4 1861 the Indigo Planters' Association asked the Governor General to appoint a special rent commission with power to compel the ryots to pay their rents

Most of the leaders of this rising came from the peasants themselves In Nadia the leadership of the revolt was provided by the Biswas brothers—Digamber Biswas and Bishnu Charan Biswas As former dewans in an indigo concern, they had a direct experience of oppression and exploitation that a ryot had to suffer As a protest against the tyrannical conduct of the indigo planter they resigned from the factory s employment and came forward to lead the rebel peasants In Maldah the peasants were led by the famous Feraizi leader Rafiq Mandal In the indigo uprising Hindu peasants and Feraizi peasants submerged their differences and worked hand in hand as ryots and rebels The rebels mostly relied upon militant mass activities on a large scale

The indignation among the people against the planters was so intense that it found expression in contemporary dramas songs and literature In the background of the oppression practised by the indigo planters *Nil Darpan* was composed by Dinabandhu Mitra

During this revolt the educated middle class of Bengal extended support to the indigo cultivators In Jessore, Sisir Kumar Ghose was the friend of the indigo ryots From Jessore he wrote a number of letters to the *Hindoo Patriot* where he gave a focus to the real picture of sufferings of the indigo cultivators In Calcutta, Harish Chandra Mukherjee the founder editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* the best mouthpiece of the educated middle class of Bengal of its time became the foremost supporter of the indigo peasants Of course it is not correct to suppose that

the educated middle class took the leadership of the rebel ryots Actually the middle class adopted a constitutional stance The rebel peasants appreciated the advice they received from their educated brethren who helped to draw their case to the attention of the Government

The peasant activities during the indigo uprising constituted a great challenge not only to the system of indigo plantation but also to the Government Indeed from the very beginning the revolt of 1859 60 remained a constant source of anxiety to the Government It appeared from the very beginning that it was not merely an agrarian outburst Perhaps it was his apprehension that led J P Grant the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to write If any one thinks that such a demonstration of strong feeling by hundreds of thousands of people as we have just witnessed in Bengal has no meaning of greater importance than an ordinary commercial question concerning a particular blue dye such a person in my opinion is fatally mistaken in the signs of the time (Buckland *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors* Vol I p 251) Indeed the rebellion became so formidable to the foreign rulers that it led Lord Canning the then Governor General to confess For about a week it caused me more anxiety than I have had since the days of Dèlhi The foreign rulers came to realise that unless this mass discontent of great proportions was redressed to some extent it would prove to be dangerous So the Government was forced to appoint a Commission of Enquiry The evidence given before the Commission revealed the operation of the system of indigo cultivation in Bengal in all its injustice

The indigo revolt of 1859 60 holds a very significant place in our history of national liberation movement For the first time in the history of our anti colonial struggle its two independent currents—spontaneous peasant resistance and constitutional agitation in defence of the peasantry—came into mutual contact This was an aspect increasingly strengthening our national liberation movement which was looked upon by the British Government naturally with much apprehension An even more effective and widespread conjunction of these two currents was to invest nationalism with great strength in the 20th century

NOTES

1 *Indigo Commission Report* (1860)

2 *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors*, C E Buckland

3 *History of Indigo Disturbance in Bengal*, Lalit Chandra Mitra

4 *The Peasantry of Bengal* R C Dutt ed, Narahari Kaviraj

5 *The Blue Mutiny*, B Kling

6 *Nil Bidroha O Bangali Samaj* Promode Sengupta

THE JAINTIA REBELLION

JAYANTA BHUSAN BHATTACHARYA

The British colonial control in the hill areas of north east India could be extended in segments only after subduing the prolonged resistance by different tribal groups operating in isolation. The Jaintia Rebellion[1] (1862-64) in which the people in Jaintia Hills (now a district of Meghalaya) took up arms to expel the British was on the contrary, an organised challenge by a hill tribe in an occupied tract in the region. The origins of the rebellion are to be found in the tribal reaction to the feudal and capitalist exploitation of the British colonial pattern and the anxiety of the people to maintain their distinct way of life. U Kiang Nongbah the leader of the upsurge, was a commoner without any formal education or outside contact but the way he roused the people and enjoyed the confidence and support of all sections of the community (including the *Dalois* or chiefs) has earned him a legendary name.

THE STORY

In 1861 in a *Durbar* (meeting) of the leading personalities of the tribe held at Syntu Ksiar near Jowai (administrative head-quarters of Jaintia Hills) it was decided to drive out the British and to restore the former Raja to the throne. The omens were consulted in the tribal way and U Kiang Nongbah was chosen as the supreme leader.[2] Preparations commenced immediately. U Kiang Nongbah moved from village to village to mobilise public opinion against the foreign rulers and organised the people into a militant force. Hundreds of *Durbars* were held secretly in different parts of the Jaintia Hills that were addressed by Nongbah himself. His impressive personality and oratory enabled him to enlist the support of the whole community. The *Dalois* also agreed to support and the unwilling amongst them were coerced to join. The clarion call of U Kiang Nongbah stirred

the whole tribe to take up arms Appeals for help were made to the Khasis in the west and the emissaries were sent to the distant areas like Burma Although the swords and the shields were confiscated by the Government after the unsuccessful outbreak in 1860 and the Jaintias forced to give up their traditional dances he asked his people to arm themselves with traditional weapons Elaborate preparations were made for the annual dancing festival (*Pastieh*) at Jalong about four miles from Jowai defying the Government orders on 28 December 1861 A police party from Jowai under U Solomon a Khasi officer rushed to the dancing ground and seized the weapons and dispersed the crowd[5] Next day a cremation procession was stopped at Jowai by the police as the administration had already prohibited the burning of dead bodies at the former cremation ground The funeral rites were considered sacred and the violation of the practice strengthened the position of U Kiang Nongbah that the *alien rulers were determined to annihilate the indigenous culture* and religion of the Jaintias The *Durbars* were hurriedly held in several places to plan the details of simultaneous action The villages were barricaded the stockades raised at strategic spots and the grains and other provisions stored in granaries The old women and children were removed to the dense jungles and caves while the menfolk got themselves ready with arms to launch the attack

On 17 January 1862 the Jaintias numbering about six hundred made a surprise attack on the military post at Jowai stormed the arsenal and the *thanah* burnt down the Christian settlement and besieged the military post[6] Another group blocked the road leading to Cherrapunji then headquarters of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District to prevent the reinforcement of the troops from there Similarly the roads between Cherra and Jaintiapur and all the routes connecting the adjoining plain districts were guarded The Jaintias also resorted to prolonged raids on the neighbouring plains to keep the administration away from the hills The British authorities were in disadvantage as the military base was considerably weakened by the reduction of the strength of the 44th Native Infantry according to the recommendation of the Peel Commission and the remainder of the regiment was scattered in a number of outlying posts in the north eastern frontier region The siege of the military post at Jowai

continued for a couple of days and Jamadar Khiraj Singh could only send a letter to Cherra through some Khasi traders from Khyrim.[8] On 25 January, 1862 E W Rowlatt the Deputy Commissioner, could make his way to Jowai and relieve the post The villages of Jowai Amwi and Nunteng were then occupied, and the stockades demolished and granaries destroyed To prevent the 'rebels' from reinforcing Jowai from their strongholds in Mynso, Shangpung Rahiang Nartiang, Borato, Makaiew and Sutnga troops were deployed to guard the passes leading to those villages.[9] The detachments of the 33rd Native Infantry were detailed at the strategic border villages of Nongthalang Nartiang and Nonjungi under Captains Robinson Morton and Andrews.[10] One battalion of the Eurasian Battery four battalions of the 44th Native Infantry and one battalion of the Bengal Military Police were brought into operation The troops under Colonel Richardson stormed the villages burnt the houses and destroyed the stockades and granaries Jalong, Shermong Darrang, Lamin and Mynso were brought under control and troops stationed there but on occupation the authorities found the villages completely deserted as the villagers had moved to other areas.[11]

These developments added to the determination of the people who relied mostly on their traditional weapons like swords and shields bows and arrows and the locally made guns called *Sulor Tynsah* The recovery of guns and pistols[12] from those killed or apprehended suggests that the 'rebels' were able to procure fire arms from the neighbouring areas Encounters of most serious nature were reported from Shangpung Nartiang Sutnga, Nongkhleh Rymbai Rahiang Borato Makaiew and Shillang-Myntang where the Jaintias could keep the areas virtually liberated for months together.[13] A large number of people including the rebel leaders and members of their cadre and also innocent women and children lost their lives At least on one occasion, several women and children were drowned in a stream while trying to escape from the vengeance of the advancing military columns.[14] The casualty on the British side was also very high Even a number of the European officers commanding the troops either died or received serious injury.[15] The situation was deemed very serious on 28 March 1862, Brigadier-General G D Showers of the Eastern Command was placed by the Government

of India in exclusive civil and military charge of the Jaintia Hills above the authority of the Commissioner of Assam[16] Similarly, B W D Morton who had made his mark as an administrator for successful handling of the Garo tribal affairs, replaced Rowlatt as the Deputy Commissioner[17] Act XVI of 1857 was brought into force, declaring that those who were 'found harbouring the rebels, supplying them with provisions or in any way assisting them, will render themselves liable to the penalties of the Act" At the same time, general amnesty was declared in respect of those who would voluntarily surrender[18] The troops and the police adopted vigorous measures to suppress the insurgents' and to stop mobilisation between the 'rebel camps'[19] Raja Rabon Singh of Khyrim and Raja Ram Singh of Cherra in the Khasi Hills were deputed as emissaries of the Government to initiate negotiations with the rebel leaders[20]

U Kiang Nongbah and his people however, raised clear demands that the people should be exempted from any kind of taxation that there should be no interference with traditional religious rites, that their Raja should be reinstated and that troops and police should be withdrawn from the Jaintia Hills[21] He moved from place to place in the hills to keep up the morale of the people and to inspire them to evade payment of any kind of taxes and to perform all customary rituals[22] The failure of the negotiations emboldened the authorities to resort to vigorous military action The former Raja at Sylhet and the members of *the former royal aristocracy at Jaintiapur were kept under surveillance* A reward of rupees one thousand was offered for the seizure of U Kiang Nongbah and three columns of troops were organised to move through every corner of the Jaintia Hills wherever the 'rebels' were supposed to have removed their families and stores[23] The Government demonstrated its power by the military occupation of the disturbed villages by the destruction of the strongholds and properties of the rebels' and by the punishment of the guilty and the innocent[24] The authorities also did their best in achieving division within the 'rebel' column by persuading sections of them to lay down arms These no doubt curbed the movement of the rebels', but they resorted to the guerilla way and received the advancing troops through archery and ambush from the caves and dense jungles Those amongst

the Jaintias who were either loyal to the Government or showed signs of surrender were confined or killed and all their properties were destroyed Even the 'coolies carrying the provisions for the troops were repeatedly ambushed

The Jaintias however suffered a major setback when on 27 November, 1862, the capture of U Kiang Nongbah the leader, was effected by Lieutenant Sadler of the 28th Native Infantry from the former's hideout In vain did the inmates of the area offer a gallant resistance U Kiang Nongbah was later tried by a military court at Jowai and publicly hanged on 30 December, 1862 Thereafter the stockades fell to the advancing troops one after another with severe losses on both sides[28] Nevertheless, the Jaintias kept up the resistance, and it was not before 1863 that their principal leaders could be forced to surrender[29] Yet, it was only on 23 March 1864 that J C Haughton, the Commissioner could send a communique to the Government of Bengal that the 'people have been very severely punished and that all inclination to rebel is at an end'[30]

BACKGROUND

The kingdom of Jaintia that was annexed by the British in 1835 by taking the Raja as a prisoner to Sylhet and then issuing a proclamation pensioning off the Raja, included, besides the present Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya some parts of the Nowgong district of Assam and the Jaintia Parganas of Sylhet and had its capital at Jaintiapur (now in the Sylhet district of Bangladesh) Compared to the neighbouring Khasi Hills where paramountcy could be imposed only after the suppression of a gallant war of resistance for about five years on the part of the Khasis and the imposition of colonial rule was on a people exhausted in prolonged military coercion the manner in which the Jaintia kingdom was annexed was viewed by the Jaintias as an act of treachery It was therefore difficult for the colonial rulers to pacify the people who on several occasions even before 1862 had demonstrated their anxiety to take up arms against alien domination The news of the dethronement of the Raja was received by the Jaintias with a shock They raised though unorganised resistance and with their bows and arrows offered the last bid for upholding the independence of the ancient land The

British troops immediately marched into the hills and imposed the authority of the company after clashes in various places[31]

The traditional loyalty of the people to the Raja had been an important factor He neither heavily taxed the people in the hills nor interfered with their customary affairs, and the villages enjoyed complete autonomy in internal matters The popularity of the Raja among the people and the latter's anxiety to bring him back on the throne was known to the authorities As a result, strict vigil was maintained on his movements during the 'sepoy mutiny' the Raja was kept under surveillance lest he would carry on intrigues with anti-British elements and foment troubles in the hills[32] The detention of the Raja at Sylhet and the news of his being kept under surveillance caused indignation in the minds of the Jaintias and one of their important demands was his reinstatement The demand came both from the common people and the *Dalois* and *Sardars* The people who had enjoyed traditional liberty and the *Dalois* and *Sardars* who had exercised considerable influence in the state affairs could hardly reconcile themselves to the British rule[33]

An important factor behind the uprising was, however, the taxation policy of the Government Following the recommendation of Mills[34] in 1854 and Allen[35] in 1858 that a moderate house tax should be levied on the Jaintias as in the neighbouring hills to make the people feel the paramount authority of the British the house tax was introduced in 1860[36] This immediately provoked a 'rebellion' but could be easily suppressed as the outburst was sudden and there was no organised leadership[37] The same year judicial stamps were introduced and this was followed by taxation on fisheries and auctioning off the right to cut timber to the highest bidder[38] This was, besides taxation an interference in the prescriptive rights of the villagers in using timber, fuel and thatch grown abundantly in the forests The Government had also since 1859 obtained the perpetual lease of the mineral tracts and waste lands[39] To make matters worse income tax was introduced in 1861[40] J C Haughton the Commissioner later observed[41] 'Taxation was introduced It was followed up by fresh taxation, and rumours of other taxes tended to disturb the minds of the people ' As Dr Barpujari observes, "The total amount realised from all such sources was

trivial, but introduction of too many taxes so closely one after another could not but produce irritation and resentment in a people who had never been subjected to such taxation [42]

Moreover the corruption and personal greed of the colonial agents had incurred the displeasure of the people Brigadier General G D Showers who was placed in exclusive civil and military charge after the outbreak had himself doubted whether the feeling of the people would have broken up into open violence unless they had been aggravated by acts of local authorities" [43] The officials of the Cherra Court were accused of oppression and corruption The Jaintias were ignorant of the law and language of the court and were, as such dependent on the mercy of the officials [44] They could do nothing except through bribes Even the *Daloi* of Jowai had to pay Rs 350/- to the *Mukhtear* (agent) of Inglis the son in law of the Political Agent and a businessman a gold *mohur* to Solomon the Khasi interpreter and Rs 15/ to Rammohun the Bengalee treasurer [45] This happened particularly because the Deputy Commissioner could hardly give personal attention to the Jaintias from Cherrapunji Besides the normal administration of the extensive district he was occupied with the construction of the Shillong Gauhati road The Government was further handicapped by the reduction of the strength of the 44th Native Infantry on the recommendation of the Peel Commission [46]

The feudal and capitalist penetration in the socio economic structure changed the situation The traditional powers and functions of indigenous institutions underwent change ever since the rise of the colonial authority There were nineteen *elakas* or *divisions in Jaintia Hills fifteen of which were under the Dalois* and four under *Sardars* They were recognised as chiefs by the British and considered as the owners of the *Raj* or communal lands They heard all civil cases and some less serious criminal cases lay within their respective jurisdictions There were complaints of lawless proceedings and corrupt practices of the *Dalois* As B W D Morton the Deputy Commissioner remarked On the hills (Jaintia) first becoming British territory the only alteration made in the position of the inhabitants appears to have been relinquishment of the cultivation of the *Raj* lands which were accordingly taken possession of by the Dolleys The

growth of the *Dalois* in wealth and authority at the cost of the age old system caused disaffection among the people The Gov ernment on the other hand gradually b'came conscious of the necessity of curbing their powers in the interest of the paramount authority Accordingly in 1850 the office was made triennial in lieu of life The position of the *Sardars* and *Dalois* was also lowered by the presence of the *Darogah* at Jowai with whom the people could lodge their complaint A rumour also crept in that the *Raj* lands would be brought under assessment Although elected by their own people they were at the mercy of the offi cials to maintain their office No wonder therefore that most of the *Dalois* and *Sardars* took the initiative and played an active part in the upsurge[40] Similarly the major items of trade were in the hands of European capitalists based in Sylhet and the hitherto unrestricted trade between the Jaintias and the people of Surma Valley passed through rigorous official control to the definite disadvantage of the local people The latter were oblig ed to work as day labourers in the lime and coal quarries run by the Europeans and the deal was far from being clean

The interference of the officials in the customary way of life of the people had deeply injured the tribal sentiment In 1854 to enquire into the administrative anomalies and to strengthen the hold of the Government a military guard was established at Jowai The location of the outpost in the heart of the village was obnoxious to the people and women had been enticed to run away with sepoys The people were also asked not to burn the r dead in the old crem ation ground at Jowai where the *tha nah* was located In 1860 the p ople were partially disarmed through the confiscation of their swords and shields that were broken up and burnt in their presence[41] These swords and shields were required by the Jaintias on festive occasions and as a result the official action could not but seriously injure the religious sentiment of the people who had sinc then nicknamed Major Rowlatt the Deputy Commissioner as shield burner Meanwhile the Welsh Presbyterian Mission had started a school at Jowai and the Jaintias were told that the parents not send ing their children to the school and one worshipping or drumming according to old usages would soon come under grief Worse still the *Darogah* with a police party interfered in the religious

dance at Jaiong This was indeed the climax Referring to the incident Rev T Jones, a Christian Missionary, wrote ' Their former grievances of every kind were heaps of powder in all directions and the *Darogah* there applied the torch to them and set the whole country in a blaze '

U Kiang Nongbah, the leader of the upsurge, was himself a factor He was a minor lad in 1835 when Jaintia was annexed by the British and not associated with the uprising of 1860 The latter incident took place when the British introduced the house tax U Solomon the *Tehsildar* of Jowai, was driven out by the people The skirmishes between the people and the police started at Jowai and gradually spread over other areas [9] Colonel Richardson, Officer Commanding at Cherra, immediately rushed to Jowai with a contingent of troops and succeeded in bringing the situation under control The Jaintias, on the other hand, indulged in incursions in the southern plains In March 1860 on a report that several hundred Jaintias were marching to Sylhet to rescue the former Raja to reinstate him on the throne, the Raja was put under heavy guard and the contingents of the Sylhet Light Infantry despatched to Jaintiapur to check any outbreak there [10] The Jaintias nevertheless succeeded in destroying the police stations at Jaintiapur Jaflong and Mulagul The reinforcements were immediately made at Jowai and Jaintiapur to deal with further eventuality and the authorities in Sylhet took preventive measures to protect the frontier villages from 'predatory raids' [11] The uprising was without any organisation on the part of the Jaintias and the authorities could bring the situation under control without much difficulty The rebels' were strongly dealt with and the people sternly warned against any 'seditious' action The Jaintias were disarmed and their swords and shields were confiscated the swords were either sold or broken and the shields burnt in their very presence ' On a rumour that the former Raja and his brothers in law as well as other members of the family had instigated the Jaintias, their movement was strictly restricted Even after the suppression of the outbreak the authorities rejected the prayer of the Raja to visit his ancestral palace at Jaintiapur and on the contrary removed him and his family to Dacca The civil officers were authorised by the Government to dismiss the *Dalois* for misconduct and the police instructed to

take cognizance of the complaints against the chiefs[64] The high handedness of the Government during this outbreak had provoked U Kiang Nongbah The secret *Durbar* at Syntu Ksiar of the representatives of the various *Dalorships* that resolved to drive out the British from the Jaintia Hills was convened by him[65]

THE CHARACTER OF THE REBELLION

The tremendous upheaval that had literally rocked the Jaintia Hills and shaken the citadel of colonial power in the north eastern hills has been described by the British officers' and colonial historians as a rebellion caused mainly by oppressive taxation The understanding of the actual character involves an objective analysis of the causes, aspirations and methods of these at the vanguard The imposition of the various taxes was no doubt an important immediate but by no means the only cause A searching enquiry into the British official records would reveal that the failure of the authorities to pacify the Jaintias and their ill conceived interference in the customary way of life, the feudal and capitalist penetration and above all, the universal tribal apathy to change besides taxation generated an explosive situation[66] About aspirations Raja Ram Singh of Cherra, who had an audience with U Kiang Nongbah and his prominent colleagues in a *Durbar* at Mawbakhon in November 1862 as a mediator on the part of the Government wrote to the Deputy Commissioner [67] 'He (Kiang Nongbah) said that if the Raj was restored and the Hills relinquished by the Government the rebels would make friends but that they wished neither to see nor have anything to do with Government He assigned as his reason for saying so that their Poojah had been interfered with He referred also to Government having in Colonel Lister's and Mr Inglis time taken the guns and wealth belonging to the Raja of Jynteahpore" As regards method, Kiang Nongbah moved in the hills to incite anti British feeling and inspire the people with love for the land Under a single leader the arrangements were so made as to resort to simultaneous action in the entire territory and cut off the lines of communication to prevent the movement of British troops At the very outset simultaneous attacks were made on the military guard and police outpost that were held under siege and the whole area virtually liberated for a couple of days [68]

A tradition current in Jowai suggests that U Kiang Nongbah

before his execution had told the Jaintias, who were forced by the troops to witness the 'scene', that if (after death) his face turned west they would remain captive for ever and if it turned east, they would be free within one hundred years The face turned east, and the Jaintias today proudly acclaim him as a prophet as India achieved her independence in 1947

NOTES

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3 Assam Secretariat Records (hereafter, A S R), Commissioner's Papers, File No 411 of 1863
4 *Ibid*
5 *Ibid* Hamlet Birch *U Kiang Nongbah* (in Khasi) p 12
6 *Selection* etc, Rowlatt to Secretary to Government of Bengal, 9 April 1862 Richardson to Adjutant General, 21 January, 1862
7 *Ibid* Richardson to Adjutant General 21 January 1862
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TRIBAL REVOLTS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ORISSA

H C DAS

Rebellions of aboriginal tribes of Orissa, as elsewhere in India, against the authority of British Government in the 19th century are among the most tragic conflicts between rulers and the ruled, between intelligence and ignorance, cunning and gullibility, duplicity and simplicity, vice and virtue and ambition and unambition The struggle of the weak against the strong the simple-minded and uninformed against the well organised, sophisticated and powerful Government machinery, has always been most hopeless resulting in loss of men and money on both sides and finally in the loss of long enjoyed freedom of the aboriginals

When we glance through the history of tribal resistance movement, we find that the tribal rebellions were mostly in the nature of resistance to the establishment of foreign Government in place of their traditional feudal authorities, coupled with economic distress caused by the expropriation of their land by the cultivators, landlords or by the Government in the course of reservation of forest and exploitation by the moneylenders traders, contractors and by Government officials "All these rebellions were defensive movements they were the last resort of tribesmen driven to despair by the encroachments of outsiders on their land or economic resources As such they could have all been avoided had the authorities recognised the aboriginals grievances and taken steps to remedy them out but before the pressure on the tribesmen had made an outbreak unavoidable Indeed anyone with first hand experience of conditions in the backward areas must be surprised, not by the occurrence of risings but by the infrequency of violent reaction on the part of the aboriginals to the loss of their ancestral lands and to their economic enslavement"[1] Dr Hutton, while dealing with the effects of British rule on the primitive tribes remarked 'Far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive tribes, the establishment of Bri

tish rule in India did most of them much more harm than good It may be said that the early days of British administration did very great detriment to the economic position of tribes through ignorance and neglect of their rights and customs

With this as the background the revolts of the tribal people of Orissa directed mainly against British Government and partly against non tribal exploiters in the 19th century may be discussed All the revolts occurred during the period of British rule in Orissa (which began in 1803) The advent of British rule in Orissa had a disastrous effect on the then traditional feudal lords and their subjects particularly the tribals in the remote hilly and jungle areas who had enjoyed freedom in the midst of bountiful nature The British administrators had practically no idea about the indigenous people and their peculiar customs and manners The tribal revolts in particular and general insurrections in the country could have been avoided to a great extent through adequate understanding and moderation

GHUMSAR RISINGS

The Ghumsar rising is the first in the series of 19th century revolts Ghumsar was a small estate in the district of Ganjam ruled by the Bhanja dynasty The British interfered in the affairs of Ghumsar at the beginning of the 19th century due to default in payment of revenue Srikar Bhanja the ruler of Ghumsar was deposed in 1800 A D and his son Dhananjaya was recognised as the ruler Dhananjaya was not capable enough to act as a zamindar Since he was a man of violent character he involved himself in nefarious activities including the murder of his own mother In 1812 he was accused of murders and the British Government decided to dethrone him A British force was sent against him He was arrested and the zamindari was forfeited Dora Bisoyee, a patriarch of the Khonds, who was awarded with the title of Birabar Patra appeared on the political scene of Ghumsar He was a shrewd politician and in charge of management of the state of affairs Extremely loyal to the Bhanja Raj family of Ghumsar, he wanted to place Balbhadra Bhanja the son of Dhananjaya Bhanja on the throne His view was endorsed by all the Khond chiefs, the members of the royal family and the common people Accordingly, the people pro

posed before the Collector of Ganjam to place Balbhadra Bhanja on the throne The most interesting part of the story is that Balbhadra Bhanja, twelve years old son of Dhananjaya, was then not living and hence a girl of that age in the disguise of Balbhadra was brought to the notice of the Collector The Collector was pleased to see the disguised Balbhadra and accepted him (!) as the real successor of Dhananjaya Since the successor was a minor the real administration was carried on by Dora Bisoyee and Jagannath Bhanja Three years passed peacefully Srikar Bhanja who was in the wilderness came back to Ghumsar and having been apprised of the plot created by Dora Bisoyee and others, disclosed the fact to the Collector of Ganjam The Collector was pleased with the expression of truth by Srikar Bhanja and helped him with troops to arrest Dora Bisoyee, Jagannath Bhanja and others But Dora Bisoyee managed to escape and spent his time in Torabadi at Soroda where his son the greatest rebel hero of the time and a terror to the British Government in the subsequent period was born

Srikar Bhanja was again placed on the throne of Ghumsar in 1821 As the zamindar of Ghumsar he paid the revenue to the British Government for some years and later fell in heavy arrears As a result he was deposed and Dhananjaya was restored in 1832 on condition that he would regularly pay the revenue failing which he would face the same fate of his predecessor Dhananjaya Bhanja made payment regularly for two years and then fell in arrears Consequently the British force under Sir Henry Taylor occupied Ghumsar in 1834 Dhananjaya sought the help of Khond Chiefs to fight against the British The Raja's summon to his tribes of Khonds was readily responded to Their greatest Chief and the foremost supporter of Raja was at that time Dora Bisoyee who was regarded as the leader of the rebellion on the hills By his able and wily counsels the Raja was guided and it must be admitted that he gave the British troops very great annoyance

The people of Ghumsar and particularly the Khonds responded to the clarion call of the Raja and Dora Bisoyee The whole state rose in rebellion against the British whose authority was confined to lowlying plains Dhananjaya Bhanja offered Rs 7000/- readily to Dora to bear the war expenditure and col-

lected money from the people of Ghumsar and the neighbouring kings Dora Bisoyee collected a large contingent and launched a guerilla warfare killing British soldiers and burning British camps At last a reward of Rs 5 000/ was declared to capture Dora The British Government appointed an officer with special powers for operation of Ghumsar affairs George Russell was appointed to look into the affairs of Ghumsar in 1836 Russell's first attempt was to capture the Raja but before that he died at the hill fort of Bodiasheri But the Khonds and the members of the royal family continued to fight against the British The tragic death of the Raja further emboldened them to be more serious in their operation On his death (they) pledged their word for the safety of the family At first they showed a friendly disposition towards the British advancing troops but when they learnt the terms of Government they preferred devastation and death ' The active advisers and exponents of the rebellion were conducted by Jagannath Bhanja, Dora Bisoyee and others in favour of Brundaban Bhanja an illegitimate son of Srikar Bhanja The Government decided to capture the rebel leaders and bring them to justice The strongholds of Kollada Galeri and Durga prasad were captured The rebel leaders sought shelter on the mountains bordering Daspalla and Nayagarah The English troops came in opposition to the Khonds and ultimately made friendship with them But they refused to deliver the refugees Whilst negotiations were still pending some men of the detachment misconducted themselves by forcibly seizing powers in the villages of the Khonds and this produced a quarrel with the inhabitants which led to the sepoys losing their lives Instigated by Dora Bisoyee the Mahah Chief appointed by the zamindar the Khonds of Ghumsar first began by cutting off all small escorts and at last ventured to attack strangers detachments under European officers '

This event caused havoc in the Khond territory Chakra Bisoyee took all possible attempts to attack the British forces here and there Mr Russell the Special Commissioner induced the Khonds to hand over Dora Bisoyee but Dora escaped to Baudh A reward of Rs 5000/ was declared for his apprehension Many rebel leaders were captured hanged or transported Dora Bisoyee escaped to Patna state where he could not stay peacefully

and escaped to Angul state The Raja of Angul handed him over to the Government and received the stipulated reward of Rs 5000/- The first phase of Ghumsar rebellion came to an end devastating the state and bringing down the Khonds to a stage of destitution

Dora Bisoyee died pathetically as a state prisoner at Gooty near Madras His death kindled the Khonds and other tribes to rise in revolts in the subsequent years The place of Dora Bisoyee was taken by another famous hero Chakra Bisoyee They yielded when overwhelmed by superior force only to rise and resist at the next available opportunity Despite all hazards, they never gave up the spirit of resistance Almost continuous resistance to British power for about half a century from 1766 to 1818 by the zamindars and Bisoyees of Ganjam prove their mettle But unfortunately their resources were too meagre to give them even the least chance of a sustained stand against the British forces What they achieved was mainly due to their courageous disposition strong determination and the help rendered by the difficult nature of the region that afforded little scope for easy manoeuvre for a modern force

MARIAH SACRIFICE

The superstition of Mariah sacrifice of the Khonds a barbarous ceremony of human sacrifice became a major cause of the tribal rebellion in Ghumsar and Khandamal The British when informed of such peculiar rites tried to abolish the practice Russell took steps to induce the Khonds to stop the practice as he was sure that in the event of coercion the Khonds would retaliate He therefore, suggested the promotion of goodwill Captain Campbell came to Ghumsar in 1837 to stop such practice In 1844 Captain Hicks was appointed Assistant Superintendent of the tributary Mahals to enforce the suppression of human sacrifice He came to Khandamal to rescue the Mariah victims but the Khonds did not part with them as they were afraid of the earth Goddess to whom the sacrifices were offered

The area wherein the human sacrifice and female infanticide continued was declared as Mariah Agency Capt Macpherson was appointed as the Agent with his headquarters at Russellkhand Through his personal contact with the Khonds he could recover

170 victims from the Khonds At this critical juncture Chakra Bisoyee appeared as the leader to support the Khonds in favour of the retention of the Mariah sacrifices He openly declared that if they handed over the Mariahs they would incur the wrath of the earth Goddess and Baudh would be taken over by the British Government, subjecting them to heavy taxation and forced labour A large number of Khond rebels demanded the return of victims who would be sacrificed before the earth Goddess Macpherson was forced to make over the Mariahs to the Raja of Baudh Inspired by their success, the Khonds burnt the camp of the Agent and forced the Raja to be sent back with them to Baudh Soon after the rainy season of 1846, Macpherson marched with a force to Khandmal to recover his lost prestige He burnt the Khonds' villages and captured some rebel leaders At that critical moment Chakra Bisoyee appeared with a large number of followers, plundering in every direction apparently in retaliation of what had been done in Baudh by the Captain s detachment [8] The British force further burnt the rebel villages and crops The revolt now became widespread

As a result the Madras Government sent an army under the command of General Dyee who during his march enquired into the matter and held Macpherson responsible for revolt His report indicates that the rebellion could have been quelled by conciliatory methods He was thus empowered by the Government of Bengal to take up the issue in the hill tract of Orissa According to his report Macpherson was transferred and Sundar Singh and Behu Khan his principal native assistants, lost their jobs for gross corruption and many Mariah victims were recovered The rebellion was put down but Chakra Bisoyee's activities continued His close associate Nabaghan Kahnroo of Baudh moved from place to place The Government finally announced pardon if Nabaghan and Chakra Bisoyee would surrender Nabaghan responded to the call but Chakra Bisoyee did not He fled to Angul with his family where he was given support by the Raja of Angul His stay in the state of Angul was not safe He moved to Sonepur and again to Baudh traversing hills and valleys in the wild tracts A reward of Rs 3 000/ was declared to apprehend him When he was hiding in the Sonepur state, the British force marched in to capture him but the Rani of Sonepur saved him Negotiations were made with the Rani of Sonepur to induce

Chakra Bisoyee to surrender but the latter did not agree When he was staying in Khandmal the Raja of Baudh was asked to apprehend him For his inability to control Chakra Bisoyee he had to cede Khandmal to the British Government. He then moved from Khandmal to Ghumsar where he staged a revolt in favour of the Raja But his quarrel with the Raja endangered his life in his native state As a result he slipped away to Kalahandi state The Government arrested Rendon Majhi the head of Bonkiya Khonds of Kalahandi for performing sacrifices The Khonds rose in revolt demanding the release of their chief The most warlike Kutia Khonds joined hands with the Bonkiyas and made a serious attack on the British camps The Government held Chakra Bisoyee responsible for the outbreak of rebellion The zamindar of Madanpur in the district of Kalahandi was removed from the management of his estate Meanwhile a vigorous attempt was made to arrest Chakra Bisoyee but again he escaped to Ganjam where he joined hands with the Saoras to rise in rebellion under Bisoyee Radhakrushna Dandasena The British force ruthlessly suppressed the revolt, burnt villages arrested Dandasena and hanged him

With the elimination of Chakra Bisoyee after 1850 the Khond rebellion did not come to an end It reappeared in 1860 due to the oppression of the Baudh Raja Narayan Mahah the Khond rebel leader of the rebellion was arrested and the rebellion was put down

THE PARALAKHEMUNDI RISING

In 1816 Paralakhemundi became a centre of insurrection over the division of Bisoyee chiefs into two groups The Bisoyee groups of Ghumah supported Pattamahadevi while the Bisoyees of Jeringi supported Sevagamahadevi the mother of the zamindar Both the groups intended to control the affairs of the state and engaged themselves in fighting The estate was managed by Pattamahadevi for four years and then by the zamindars mother for sometime The zamindari was attached in 1829 for default of the payment of revenue The Government appointed Parimanavadeo as manager The Bisoyees did not like Pattamahadevi was placed once again on the throne in 1849 The zamindars mother on the other hand declared open hostility against the authority of Pattamahadevi The Bisoyees supported her cause

In 1832 George Russell the Special Commissioner, took up the matter The Bisoyees of Jeringi assisted Russell to capture the leaders of their rival group Major Bayter in charge of the British force of ParalaKhemundi became suspicious of the Bisoyees of Jeringi and sent troops against them The Bisoyees on the other hand staged an attack on the British force Ultimately the Bisoyees were captured and hanged and the fort of Jeringi was occupied

THE KOL RISING OF BAMANGHATI

Bamanghati of Mayurbhanj district was under the jurisdiction of the Raja of Mayurbhanj In 1821 the Kols of Singhbhum revolted The Government put down the revolt, creating a separate Kolhan territory consisting of the Pidhas of Ponahat, Sadeinat, Kharsuan and four Pidhas of Bamanghati Madhava Das, the Sarvarakar of the Pidhas of Bamanghati rose in revolt in 1832 against the authority of the Mayurbhanj Raja The Government interfered in the matter and brought Bamanghati under the control of the Raja of Mayurbhanj The Kols drove out Madhava Das from Bamanghati[9]

THE BHUINYA RISINGS IN KEONJHAR

The revolt of the Bhuinyas broke out in 1868 over the issue of accession of the king to the throne The Raja of Keonjhar died in the same year leaving no male successor The *Phulhari* wife of the Raja had a son named Dhanurjaya The Rani of Keonjhar wanted to place her adopted son on the throne But Ravenshaw, the Superintendent of the Tributary Mahals decided to place Dhanurjaya on the throne The petition of the Rani was rejected by Ravenshaw and finally by the Government of Bengal Dhanurjaya a minor, was recognized as the Raja of Keonjhar In 1867 the Bhuinya Sardars of Keonjhar were forced to recognize him as the Raja But Ratna Nayak an important Bhuinya leader declared Brundaban as the legal heir to the throne In course of time a group of Bhuinya leaders pleaded in favour of Brundaban and decided to stage a revolt Dhanurjaya whose education was arranged by the Government at Cuttack proceeded to Keonjhar, but at Anandapur the Bhuinyas and the people did not recognise him as the Raja The Rani deputed several Bhuinya leaders to Calcutta to plead with the Lieutenant-Governor in favour of the Rani, but he did not alter the earlier decision Ravenshaw came

with Dhanurjaya in 1867 and attempted to have an amicable settlement with the Rani. But she did not accept Dhanurjaya as the king Although he was placed on the throne several Bhumya leaders did not attend the ceremony On the failure of her mission the Rani influenced Colonel Dalton, the Commissioner of Chotanagpur through her brother the Raja of Saraikala The Rani who left Keonjhargada was persuaded to come back in 1868 The accession of Dhanurjaya was ceremonially accepted by the Bhumya leaders The ceremony was performed in the presence of the Rani Ravenshaw and the officers from Chotanagpur Those Bhumya leaders who did not participate in the function were oppressed by the Dewan of Keonjhar

In 1868 the Bhumyas rose in revolt while supporting the cause of Brundaban Bhanja They captured the Dewan and his associates plundered Keonjhargada and seized the place The Juangs and Kols joined the rebels Ravenshaw held the Rani of Keonjhar responsible for the rebellion The Deputy Commissioner of Singhbum marched to Keonjhar with a force, but failed to persuade the leaders to return the captives When Dr Hayes failed in his attempt he requisitioned another contingent of army from Singhbhum The insurgents with a large number of Bhumyas captured British troops and approached towards Keonjhargada The British force from all sides attacked the insurgents and captured the strongholds of Ratna Nayak In the face of constant attack from all sides the Bhumya insurgents armed with bows axes and swords failed to continue their fight in an organised manner Many had to surrender Ratna Nayak did not surrender but was captured by the Paiks of Pallahara on the 15th August and brought to Cuttack In the trial Ratna and his associates were charged with rebellion and murder of the Dewan and the supporters of the Raja Seven persons were sentenced to death twenty seven to transportation for life and one hundred and forty nine to various periods of imprisonment" Ratna Nayak and three of his followers were hanged at Cuttack

DHARANI MELI

Dharanidhar a minor boy of Bhumya tribe was trained in the survey school at Cuttack and was in the good books of the Raja Appointed to the survey of Keonjhar after his training he

attempted to educate the Bhumyas The Raja did not like the idea and forced him to survey the border area of Keonjhar and Singhbhum Meanwhile Dharanidhar's brother and his associates were arrested for staging an agitation against the practice of forced labour without payment The Bhumyas were forced to dig out a channel from a hill without payment for their labour Dharanidhar s brother and other Bhumyas submitted a petition to the Superintendent of Tributary Mahals The Raja arrested the petitioners Dharanidhar left the job and instigated the Bhumyas to rise against the Raja He became the leader of the revolt and with the insurgents he looted the palace and the bazaar The situation became so tense that the Raja fled to Anandapur and sent Fakirmohan Senapati, the Assistant Dewan, from Anandapur to Keonjhar The Raja approached the Superintendent of Cuttack for help A detachment of British force was sent to Keonjhar Fakirmohan resorted to a trick to capture Dharanidhar He was asked to plead his cause before the British officer coming to Keonjhar On good faith he appeared before the police officer but was promptly arrested and sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment Others were sentenced to various terms of rigorous imprisonment

NOTES

1 C Von Furer-Haimendorf, 'Aboriginal Rebellions in Deccan" in *Man in India* No 4, 1945, pp 208-209
2. J H Hutton, Quoted by G S Ghurye in *The Scheduled Tribes*, p 150
3 Col Campbell *Thirteen Years Services among the Wild Tribes of Khondistan* p 32
4 W W Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal* Vol XII, p 229
5 P J Malbbey, *The Ganjam District Manual*, p 149
6 *Calcutta Review* "Human Sacrifice in Orissa , 1846
7 Col Campbell, *op cit* p 90
8 P Mukherjee, *History of Orissa in the 19th Century*, pp 224-226
9 C E Buckland, *Bengal Under the Lt Governors* Vol I, p 425
10 P Mukherjee, *op cit* p 410

TRIBAL UPRISINGS 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY ORISSA*

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High concentration of tribal population is one of the important social characteristics of the State of Orissa. The Scheduled tribes constitute 23.11 per cent of the total population[1] of the State and they may be broadly classified into two regional groups (i) the tribals of the Chotanagpur plateau and its extension and (ii) the tribals of the Eastern Ghat ranges Dandakaranya and Chhatisgarh region. The present districts of Sundergarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj are included in the former region while the districts of Kalahandi, Phulbani and Koraput come under the latter.

The Santal, Kol, Munda, Bhuyan, Kisan and Oraon are the major tribes of the districts of Sundergarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. All of them are the Central Indian tribes which are sometimes commonly referred to as Kols or Coles and speak a dialect of the Mundari group of languages. All of them have affiliations to Munda in language and culture and claim to have migrated from Chotanagpur, Singhbhum and their neighbouring places in Bihar thus claiming a regional identity in matters of their origin, mythology, culture and tradition. In view of the rich mineral resources of this region, the tribes have been exposed to the contact of the outsiders for a long time.

The major tribes of southern Orissa, coming under the other tribal region are the Khonds, the Gonds, the Saoras, the Parojas, *the Koyas and the Gadabas. The tribes which are seen in this* part of the State are either the original settlers or the tribes of the Dravidian origin and have little affiliation to the tribes of northern Orissa. They have their own distinctive tradition, mytho

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logy and culture and have been influenced by the Dravidian tribes The Khonds, numerically the dominant tribe of the region, can hardly claim immunity from such influences The tribe calls itself "Kuiloka" and "Kui' is the language of the tribe Possibly both the terms are derivatives from "KO" or "KU", a Telugu word for mountain.[2] Nevertheless, the tribes of both the regions have passed through a great deal of Oriya influences which have also coloured their tradition and mythology The association of the tribes of Orissa with their feudal chiefs is very much significant The tribes in the northern part of the State were under the princely rule in the States such as Bonai, Gangpur, Pal-Labara, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj On the other hand, the tribes of southern Orissa had associated themselves with the States of Baudh, Kalahandi and Daspella as well as with the British territories of Khandmal and Koraput which are also characterised by feudal background.[3] It was the former region which formed a part of what is called "Jharkhand" in the *Akbarnama* and it was ruled by tribal chiefs and various aboriginal tribes—"the Cheros being predominant in Palamau, the Mundas in Ranchi and Bhuyans and Gonds in the Orissa States"

In both the regions there occurred a number of tribal uprisings in the nineteenth century which were of the nature of "restorative rebellions" During this period the tribal population had to fight against economic exploitation loss of freedom and tribal autonomy They had also made violent efforts to resist the domination of the higher castes and oppression by the rulers Protests against British rule were equally vehement Alien rule it was feared "intended to assess their lands, subject people to forced labour and punish their leader[4] for the religious rites performed by them In other words, all these uprisings mostly sprang from heavy exactions from the tribals The positive aspect of the uprisings lay in restoration of the social order, prevalent among the tribes in earlier times when they used to enjoy recognition autonomy and patronage from the ruling class

THE TRIBES AND THE PRINCES

The tribes being the original settlers of Orissa and the adjoining States, the ruling chiefs (though most of them claimed

Rajput origin) used to follow a policy of friendship towards the tribals Under the system then prevalent, a high sense of cordiality prevailed in the relationship between the tribes and the ruling families In the western part of Orissa, a large number of Zamindaris were held by the tribal chiefs belonging to Gond, Binjhal Bhuyan and Khond tribes The tribal Zamindars held their estates as fiefs at low fixed rates and terms of service In most of the feudatory states the military tenures were exclusively in the hands of tribal chieftains The tribals continued to thrive under the impression that the country belonged to them and the rulers were their own The ruling chief of Kalahandi used to sit on the lap of a Khond woman which constituted a part of the rites celebrating his accession to the guddee A legend regarding the relationship between the Binjhal chief of Borasambar and the feudal chief of Patna is more interesting It is said that Romai Deo, the founder of the Chouhan dynasty in Patna, was born and brought up in the house of a Binjhal chief and his mother was afforded protection by him In view of this, the household of the Bariha zamindar of Borasambar was recognised as the uncle's house of the Raja and the former used to affix the 'Tika' to the chief at the time of his accession to the guddee' The Bhuyan Sardars (chiefs) of Keonjhar used to profess allegiance to the new ruler soon after the latter's succession to the guddee was declared and this ceremony was considered a significant event

The Adivasi rebellion of 1868 in the State started following the refusal of the Bhuyan leaders to profess allegiance to the nominee of the British Government to the guddee of Keonjhar Some Kharia families of Mayurbhanj acquired the title of Patabandha because they enjoyed the privilege of placing a silk cloth (Pata) over the ratha or chariot of Jagannatha on the occasion of the car festival celebrated by the ruler of Mayurbhanj at his capital They called themselves the "Brahman Kharia" In the States of Bonai and Gangpur when the succession of the Raja took place the acknowledged leader of the Bhuyan clan went through a ceremony of making over to the new chief the country and the people The tribal deities were Hinduised under the aegis of the ruling chiefs to maintain strong religious bonds between the rulers and the tribes It was due to his closeness to the Gond and Binjhal chiefs and the active support extended

by them that Surendra Sai a claimant to the guddee of Sambalpur State, could wage a great struggle against the British Government

Thus some of the Maharajas had established a Paternalistic and personalised relationship with the tribesmen that was often reinforced by real or mythical agnatic relationship'[6]

During the 19th century economic exploitation of the tribals by the higher castes constituted the grounds for recurrent tribal insurrections At times in their struggle against exploitation, as has been observed in the Gond Maru' movement of Sambalpur, they exhibited wild turbulence They not only turned violent against those who were responsible for their exploitation but they also killed innocent people looted and burnt a large number of non tribal villages as a token of their discontent against the rest of the society It may be recalled that Sambalpur and its adjoining States were mainly inhabited by aboriginal tribes and most of the zamindars belonged either to the Gond or to the Binjhal tribes and the names of their zamindaries were of non Aryan origin All these tribes and their chiefs had a genuine apprehension that for their active support to Surendra Sai, the rebel claimant to the guddee of Sambalpur they had to part with their fertile lands to be assigned as Jagirs Debottar or Brahmottar to the people belonging to the higher castes Raja Narayan Singh confirmed this apprehension on his succession to the guddee on 11th October 1833 He followed a policy of appeasement towards the higher castes by means of creating 37 Maufi tenures which provoked the aborigmals to launch a massive revolt against the State as well as the civilised sections of society It was a violent revolt which is said to have closely resembled 'the tyranny and lootings carried on by the Bargees of the Maratha days'[8] 'We get an authentic account from a member of one of the aggrieved families

Life and properties were quite unsafe the ryots could not raise their crops in their lands and as soon as they were ripe, they were looted and removed from the fields by these bands of robbers There were day light robberies and dacoity, arson looting and murder the economic and social life of the people were completely paralysed From little mischiefs to day-light murder and looting were the order of the day Even now the days are remembered with alarm as the memories have come

down from generations to generations The atrocities of minor nature were the looting of cakes which were being prepared by the housewife a certain evening and the looting of all the belon gings of the bride when she was on a procession to her father in law s house for marriage Beginning from trifling offences the atrocities could assume the proportion of looting the entire village burning of all the houses and murder of those who op posed such action

A Brahmin talukdar of 96 villages who was entrusted with the responsibility to put down the agitation was killed by the Gonds in 1843 Another Brahmin landlord was also put to death by the rebels The British Government which took over Sambalpur in 1849 faced serious difficulties in putting down the rebellion

It was the same consideration which provoked the Khond rising in Kalahandi Though the dispute sparked off over the ques tion of acknowledging the authority of the new ruler the rebel lion broke out chiefly due to the economic exploitation of the Khonds by the Koltas a class of prosperous agriculturists of western Orissa The cause of the rising was despair and rage with which the simple Khonds who had been the pioneer culti vators of the soil in certain parts of Kalahandi found themselves overreached and superseded by a far more efficient class of agri culturists [9] The Rajas under the temptation of the offer of a handsome rent from the Koltas encouraged them to cultivate as much land as they could as a result of which the Khonds found themselves deprived of the possessions of their old villages and fields by these interlopers of superior agricultural capacity This led to a strong agrarian hatred and jealousy In a meeting held in the middle of May 1878 at Balwaspur which was at tended by a large number of leading Khonds they determined unanimously to massacre the Koltas For natural reverence for their chief whom they indeed worshipped as an embodiment of God they had been prevented from entertaining or manifesting any personal animosity against him They planned to attack the English Superintendent of the State thereby preventing him from taking any step to interfere with their designs to wreck their vengeance on the Koltas themselves They swore to carry out these designs and kissed the sacrificial axe in token of their promise The execution of this purpose was entrusted to the various representatives each of whom might carry it out in his

own neighbourhood The result was that over a hundred Koltas were murdered and forty persons including women and children were taken as prisoners by the Khonds "The wretched prisoners fell at the feet of the leading Khonds and begged them to spare their lives, but they were told that none of the men among them would be spared' [11] Superstitions and religious fanaticism also guided the Khonds in this rising The old ceremonies called the Mariah sacrifice which had been put down with great difficulty by the British officers some years before was revived The sacrifice involved killing captives and hacking off pieces of their flesh which they buried in the fields as an offering to the earth goddess which would ensure their fertility [12]

The British Government had to send forces from Raipur, Ganjam and Sambalpur to put down the agitation On the charge of murder of the Koltas, ten Khond leaders were hanged Though peace was restored the Koltas were afraid of going back to their villages [13]

The disturbances which broke out in the princely State of Gangpur in 1897 had a similar background When the tribal village chiefs were displaced by the Raja in order to instal the Agharia and the rich people of Sambalpur, agitations were organised under the leadership of an aboriginal village chief called Madri Kalo It took the shape of open revolt by the discontented which culminated in a series of more or less serious dacoities and a general blackmailing of villages in the disturbed tracts [14] The agitation ended in the Raja giving up his attempt and resorting to help from the armed British police

The Khond risings in Baudh Ghumsar and Khandmal during the years 1846-1848 broke out in protest against Governmental interference in their traditional way of life and was "not of such magnitude to be termed a rebellion' It was just a temporary show of disaffection and resentment of the Khonds at the governmental interference in their religious rites [15] More particularly the agitation was directed against the local authorities The Khonds developed an "extreme hatred" towards captain Macpherson who assumed the charge of Agent in 1845 and exhibited an "oppressive conduct" He resorted to coercive measures like burning plundering and destruction of grains etc Further the local authorities made demands on the Khonds for coolies and supplies

Oppression by the ruling chiefs and their officials was also responsible for tribal risings There were two such risings—one in 1860 and the other in 1862 the former in Baudh against the oppressive Raja and the latter in Khandmal against the exploitation of a local Tehsildar Commenting on the Adivasi rebellion of 1868 in Keonjhar which was in continuation to the rising of 1862 C E Buckland observed that the oppression and exactions of the Raja were the immediate causes of disturbances which provoked a communal rising among the Bhuyans The Dewan and his partisans were the immediate targets of attack The Bhuyans plundered Keonjhargarh besieged the palace and carried away D wan Nanda Dhal and his partisans

In the southernmost part of Orissa which was included under the Visakhapatnam Agency tract there occurred a number of petty risings locally known as the *fituris* Disturbances which broke out in 1864 and 1879 among the Koyyas were chiefly due to the excesses committed by the local police When the Khonds of Kalahandi rose in revolt against the Koltas they had also invited the Koyvas to join with them but the call did not evoke any response from the latter[1] The most notorious of all *fituris* was the rising of 1922 which could not be suppressed until its leader Alluri Sitarama Razu was killed in 1924 The hill man however did not evince any interest in the rising[18] Thus the tribal risings in the southern part of Orissa were extremely localised and were mostly confined to a single tribal group Inter tribal cooperation and solidarity had not developed in this part of the State till the dawn of independence

The religious movement which was called the Alekh cult with a large number of tribal followers was a manifestation of the long standing discontent and grievances of the tribal people *against the civilised sections of the society The cult despised* all customs and manners of the well off sections of the society The converts to this religion numbered 20 to 30 thousand in 1867 and their number went on increasing further with the passage of time They used to put on the bark of Kumbhi tree and refused to take food in metal pots and at the house of a Raja, a Brahmin or a Washerman who were supposed to take part in the sins of the public [9] thus developing a contempt for everything considered civilised They not only hated the Brahmins and the ruling class but also made a violent struggle against their reli

gion A group of men and women who were the followers of the cult attacked the Jagannath temple at Puri with the "avowed intention to lay violent hands upon Jagannath and destroy the image' [3] A substantial contribution to the development and propagation of the cult was made by a Khond called Bhima Bhoi, though it is said to have originated from Mahima Gosain who lived on the Kapilas hill in the State of Dhenkanal The cult was very much popular and had a large following among the tribals and the backward population of the Orissa States

The cult, however, had very little influence over the tribes of what constitutes the northern part of present Orissa The movement which took place in the closing decade of nineteenth century resulted in the emergence of Munda leadership in the Chotanagpur region[4] and laid the ideological foundations of the Jharkhand movement It had an organisational base with ethnicity and religiosity as the basis of mobilisation and involvement of the people in it The princely States of Orissa close to the Chotanagpur region were influenced by this movement [5] There are places in this part of Orissa which have been named after this Munda religious leader [6] Thus it may be observed that while among the southern tribes, the risings were mostly localised, intertribal cooperation did characterise the socio-economic life of the tribal population in the northern part of Orissa which in later years gave rise to the Jharkhand movement

The tribal uprisings till the forties of the 20th century were not much different from the preceding insurrections Though the Congress leaders tried to launch resistance movement in the tribal areas which aimed at overthrowing the British Government as well as native princes from power they could not succeed in mobilising the tribals in their favour The resistance movement in the States was a middle class movement sponsored by the people of the coastal areas and it had nothing to do with tribal solidarity During the period from 1908 to 1928, as many as five uprisings broke out in Bamra and all these risings were launched against 'unreasonable enhancement of rent and assessment of new abwabs so common in the States"

The northern State of Gangpur included in the cluster of feudatory States of Orissa witnessed a serious agrarian discontent in 1938 The immediate cause was the enhancement of rent of the

Munda tenants of north Gangpur The agitators were all Christians who were the close followers of the Christian tribals of Ranchi Two Christian missionaries were called upon by the Raja to pacify the movement but it yielded no results The movement gathered momentum culminating in the Simko firing in 1939 resulting in 41 deaths The agitation was led by the Nirmal Munda demanding exemption from the payment of land revenue The significance of the movement lay in the emergence of Munda leadership in the region *which later put forth the demand of a separate Jharkhand State within the Union of India*

NOTES

1 *Census* 1971

2 R V Russell and R B Mirza Lal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* Vol III (London MacMillan, 1916) pp 464 465

3 Though Koraput came under the zamindari areas the tribes were ruled from the fifteenth century until the British period by a line of kings from whom is descended the family of the Jeypore zamindars See R C S Bell *Orissa Dist Gazetteers Koraput* (Cuttack Orissa Govt Press 1945) p 22

4 P Mukherjee *History of Orissa* Vol VI (Bhubaneswar Utkal University Press 1954) *op cit* pp 405-413

5 J K Das *The Tribes of Orissa* Census of India 1961 Vol XI Orissa Part V B Report on Scheduled Tribes of Orissa Book I (Delhi Manager of Publications 1972) p 30

6 Myron Weiner & John Osgod Field *Electoral politics in the Indian States Three Disadvantaged Sectors* Vol II (Delhi Manohar Book Service 1975) p 82 Also see Surajit Sinha State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India *Man in India* Vol 42 No 1, January March 1962 pp 35 79

E T Dalton Notes of a tour made in 1863 64 in the Tributary Mahals under the Commissioner of Chotanagpur Bonai Gangpore Odeypore and Sirgooja , *Journal of the Asiatic Society* Calcutta Part II No I 1865 pp 1 12 He maintains The legend of the Rajput Prince of northern India going with his pregnant wife on pilgrimage to Puri is associated with the miraculous origin myth of a number of other states in Central India and Orissa

7 A Das *Life of Surendra Sai* (Cuttack Vidyapuri 1963), pp 36-41

8 *Ibid*
9 *Ibid* p 41
10 Andrew H L Fraser *Among Indian Rajah and Ryot* (London Seelay Service Co Limited, 1912) p 37
11 *Ibid* pp 138 141
12 L S S O Malley (ed) *Modern India and the East A Study of the Interaction of their Civilisations* (London Oxford University Press 1968) pp 734 735
13 *Utkal Dipika* (Cuttack) June 10 1882
14 Report to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal by Sir Edward Gait quoted in N Senapati & D C Kumar (ed) *Orissa District Gazetteers Sundergarh* (Cuttack Government of Orissa 1955) pp 75 76
15 P Mukherjee *op cit* pp 405-413 Also see H K Mahtab (ed) *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa* Cuttack 1957 Vols I and II
16 *Ibid*
17 R C S Bell *op cit* pp 35 36
18 *Ibid*
19 P Mukherjee *op cit* p 465
20 *Ibid*
21 A few are of the opinion that in 1875 A D Bhima Bhoi, by a gift of divine grace himself proclaimed the novel injunctions of Mahima Dharma He is said to have hailed from a small village Gramadiha in Rairokhol and belonged to the sixties of the nineteenth century He took a Brahmin wife and had some children He lived a major part of his life in the village Khaliapali in the State of Sonepur till his death

See Chittaranjan Das "Mahima Dharma A Religious movement of the 19th century Orissa" in *Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature of Orissa* (Santiniketan Visva Bharati Studies 14 1951)
22 K Suresh Singh *Dust Storm and Hanging Mist Story of Birsa Munda and His Movement* (Calcutta Firma K L Mukhopadhyay 1966 pp 31 144)
23 K L Sharma Jharkhand Movement in Bihar *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol XI Nos 1 and 2 January 10 1976
24 Birsa is a police station near Rourkela it is also the name of an assembly constituency of the district of Sundergarh Severe protests were made when the name of the Birsa Chawk near Rourkela was changed to Ganghi Chowk ultimately resulting in the restoration of the old name Some tribals were seriously insisting on correctly writing the name of the place associated with the name Birsa in 1978 The author on his visit to Rourkela sometime in June 1978 was given to understand by the local people that according to the tribes associated with this campaign the correct name of this munda leader was Birsa not Bisra

A LEGEND IN HER LIFE TIME

AMIT K NAG

The name Rani Gaidiliu is a legend And the lady of the hills known by this name became a legend in her own lifetime *But this lady was never the Rani in the traditional sense of the* erm However as a great leader of her people she is indeed a Rani as the celebrated Ram Mohun Roy was a Raja' Her name is Gaidinliu—not Gaidiliu The rest of the country and the outside world came to know about her in 1937 when the late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru described her as the Rani of the Nagas and expressed his great sense of shock that a young girl of a tender age as the Rani was at that time was undergoing a long prison term[1] She was born on January 26 1915 at Long kao (Nungkao) village situated on the Imphal Silcher Road in the Tamenglong area of Manipur State Her home village is *high up on the Haojongbut mount in the midst of thick* forest overlooking the great Barak river in the Manipur West District The third daughter among eight children of Lotthomang and Kalotlenliu of the influential Pamei clan of the Rongmei subtribe she was an independent minded and strong willed girl from her childhood At the tender age of barely thirteen she became associated with the movement started by Jadonang (1905 1931) a first cousin of hers The aim of the movement was to drive out the Britishers and achieve freedom

Miss Ursula Graham Bower[2] described this movement as odd and interesting and she wrote For generations there had been a prophesy that one day a Naga King would arise drive out the British and rule over all who eat from the wooden platter—that is all the Naga tribes In 1929 a seer of Kam biron a man named Jadonang proclaimed himself the promised Messiah He conceived and founded a new religion—a blend of Hinduism and Christianity grafted on to a Naga Animist stock—but though the authorities heard early of his activities *he was not breaking the law*

According to another historian[3] "Gaidiliu's area of operation was continuous to the trijunction of the present states of Assam (mostly the North Cachar district), Manipur (the north-western part, formerly, the Tamenglong sub division) and Nagaland (formerly the Naga hills district of Assam) The people affected were the Kabui and their kins, the Kaccha Naga It is important to note this geographical position The political administrative boundaries drawn in the British period hardly corresponded to the ethnic map and in the recent period, the demand for the unification of the Kabui and the Kaccha Naga has been advanced from time to time by the Zeliangruong movement The grievance was accentuated by the presence of a large number of Kukis who had been inducted there, with guns, by the *British Government in the 1850s with a view to containing the* Nagas The result was drastic reduction of the land man ratio of these shifting cultivators and perennial inter-tribal feuds which culminated in the messianic movement of Jadonang in 1931

All messianic movement may be regarded as unconscious revolts in as much as they spring from social protest, aim at deliverance and take on a religious colour Jadonang developed a special type of cult which according to J P Mills was 'a very debased travesty of Hinduism (national archives 3) but according to some other official reports, was an amalgamation of elements of Animism Hinduism and Christianity He was the high priest of the god of that religion, and followed the principle of purity He would preach in Masses attended by among the villagers their headmen in felt-hats He was also a healer basing himself on the interpretation of dreams Under him there were a number of maibas (medicine men) the chief among whom appears to have been Gaidilu According to Jadonang's statement after arrest, denying the murder charge against him Gaidilu had met him for treatment in early 1930 and almost immediately became a maibi but not at his instance."

J P Mills summed up the aims of Gaidiliu's movements in a much better way (National Archives 3)

The aims of the movement are exceedingly nebulous They are based on the old belief that a Naga King will one day

arise Jadonang who is believed still to be present in spirit is held to be that king who will reign with Gaidilu. The belief *is summed up in the slogan* The day of the Nagas is coming. This necessarily involves the disappearance of the British rule and the subjection of the Kukis.

It will be instructive to turn to Rani Gaidinliu's own account which says[1]: While the independence movement by the Indian National Congress was in full swing in the other parts of our country the late Jadonang from Puilon (Kambiron) a Zeliangrong village in Manipur State got the inspiration to offer himself for the cause of the freedom movement of Mahatma Gandhi in 1925 in these farflung hills in the eastern corner of our country and took over the leadership among the Zeliangrong people in Manipur State the Naga Hills and the North Cachar Hills. He found that the existing religious practice prevented the people not only from social activities with a heavy demand on material sacrifices but being enslaved by the old religious rituals taboos and gennas. He devised a process of reformation of the old religious practices mainly for the purpose of strengthening the political movement in order to get the maximum support of the masses. With the ultimate aim of wresting the political power from the hands of the alien rulers Jadonang launched the movement from 1925 onwards and in the course of about six years the entire Zeliangrong community stretching from Manipur through Nagaland to the North Cachar Hills came en masse to the call for the liberation and for the expression of their one time solidarity of the tribe. Finding the danger of such a movement among the simple illiterate and primitive Zeliangrong tribe which might endanger the stability of the then British empire the alien government arrested Jadonang and after a mock trial he was hanged on August 29 1931 at Imphal.'

The execution of Jadonang did not kill the Zeliangrong movement. *The burden of the leadership of this movement* was now Gaidinliu's who did not have the opportunity of receiving any formal education. Neither was there any facility for education *for a girl in Tamenglong in these days nor the people in general* there were interested in education.

It goes to the credit of Gaidinliu that she not only picked up

a working knowledge of about a dozen languages and dialects but got all the necessary instructions in social, cultural and religious matters of the Zeliangrong community

The movement continued to gain momentum under her leadership. The no-tax campaign became very popular incurring the wrath of the British rulers who let loose a reign of terror in Zeliangrong areas. Collective fines amounting to Rs 2,920 were imposed and 29 licensed guns were seized. Jadonang's call for freedom echoed and re-echoed from every nook and corner of their land. Led by this gallant girl the Zeliangrongs refused to offer impressed labour and compulsory porterage subscriptions to the alien rulers.

"Troops were sent out to all the districts in which the Kutcha Naga (Zeliangrong) country fell i.e. Manipur, Naga Hills and North Cachar. Outposts were set up at strategic points, searches were instituted, patrols went out and local movement between villages was sternly restricted. But Gaidinliu piloted by her North Cachar agent, Masang of Kepelo (Kipeilua) remained at large. The bulk of the Zeme were on her side. She came and went like a ghost."[5]

During this period, Gaidinliu came in occasional contact with some revolutionary nationalists of the Surma Valley and efforts were made for greater co-ordination among all elements in the hills and plains engaged in the struggle against the alien rule. However, the communication gap on the one hand and iron rule of the British on the other, thwarted such efforts nipping them in the very bud.

Frightened by the spectre of the growing Gaidinliu movement, the British rulers even went to the extent of seeking other means to destroy her charisma. According to the testimony of the Rani herself, she was coaxed with a marriage proposal by a man deputed by the Political Agent (of Manipur) to arrest her in 1931. She was told that she would be absolved of all charges if she accepted the marriage proposal. Gaidinliu not only turned it down scornfully but hoodwinked him and escaped from Longkao (Nungkao) with her trusted colleagues. The rebels led by her regrouped and remained in the

trans Barak basin for about five months and the British rulers failed to capture her hideouts in the thick jungles

J P Mills, then D C of the Naga hills, describes her operations in his district in this way 'From evidence I have managed to collect I am satisfied that Gaidinliu, with six or seven clansmen or adherents of Jadonang, entered the district from the North Cachar Hills She was escorted from village to village by numbers of women and youngmen, parties travelling by night where detection by unfriendly persons was likely'

In August 1931 she shifted her temporary headquarters to North Cachar Hills and the entire Zeliangrong domain stood solidly behind her Realising the gravity of the situation, the Assam Governor in council ordered that the operations against the Gaidinliu movement were to be centralised under the direct control of J P Mills, I C S, the then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, with the S D O of Haflong and officer of the Manipur State assisting him and that the 3rd and the 4th Battalions of the Assam Rifles were to be used Troops were sent out in all directions and a thorough search for Gaidinliu was instituted Her photographs were widely distributed throughout the three areas All the girls having the name "Gaidinliu' were interrogated and it is said many girls having similar names had to change their names Even Gaidinliu had to adopt a new name—Dalenliu

Mr Harvey, the then President of the Manipur State Durbar, offered a reward of Rs 300 for her arrest—this amount was subsequently raised to Rs 500 and any village giving information about her was promised a tax remission of ten years But all these failed to shake her people's loyalty to her

The Manipur Government meted out stern punishment to her supporters Four villages were burnt down and the Assam Rifles contingents were deployed for one of the most arduous man hunts in our history In the North Cachar Hills the rebels had an encounter with the Assam Rifles on February 16 1932 In March 1932 a large force of Naga rebels raided the Assam Rifles outpost at Hangrum in broad daylight But the raid of the rebels failed because of the superiority of the arms and training of the Assam Rifles And for this raid the Zeliangrong village of Boupungwam in the Baro Hills district was burnt down by

the Assam Rifles Gaidinliu now moved eastward and entered the Angami Naga area from where her influence also spread to the Mao and the Marram Naga areas of Manipur

In October 1932 she moved into Pulomi village and started the construction of a wooden fortress after the pattern of the Assam Rifles palisade at Hangrum She told her followers that the next two months would be a crucial period which would determine whether she or the British would win She was thus preparing for the last trial of strength The wooded fortress under construction was designed to accommodate about four thousand warriors The alert Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills decided to act quickly on the basis of intelligence reports and despatched a strong contingent of the Assam Rifles under the command of Captain Macdonald to carry out a surprise raid on Pulomi

To hoodwink Gaidinliu's intelligence Captain Macdonald first made a false movement of armed forces towards a wrong direction before making a surprise raid on Pulomi Before day break on October 17 1932 the forces led by him completely surprised the rebels who surrendered without any effective resistance and Gaidinliu was arrested from a dwelling house She was brought to the district headquarters Kohima via Khonoma village She was not only handcuffed but a thick rope was tied around her waist When the party led by Captain Macdonald reached Khonoma village an old man of the village was shocked to see such a sight He entreated Captain Macdonald to untie the rope from the waist of Gaidinliu because it was too humiliating for a young girl This request failed to move the British captain who asked the old man to keep quiet At this the Khonoma man was so much enraged that he picked up a stone and hit the Captain's forehead with it Immediately the old man was arrested and beaten mercilessly On the following day she was taken to Kohima Her younger brother Khusinang was also among the persons arrested The Interpreter refused to supply extra clothes to them in the chilly night of Kohima Her brother Khusinang was kept in the Assam Rifles quarterguard for six months Afterwards he was imprisoned for three months at the Mokokchung jail On his release from prison his movements were restricted to Mokokchung and he was

made to serve the Head Dobhasi of Mokokchung as a virtual slave for nine years. Gaidinliu was removed to Imphal for trial. She was sentenced to imprisonment for life on conclusion of the trial which continued for about ten months. Most of her leading followers were also arrested and imprisoned. Her General Haidua was killed in May, 1934. Dikeu, one of her 'Commanders' who continued to dodge the British might for another eight years was executed in 1940.

According to Ursula Graham Bower,[6] Ghumee had been captured. Masang had done six months and had been released. But before Gaidinliu was arrested she had told Masang and the rest that even if she were caught it would not matter, the Government would imprison only her body but her real and divine self would be safe elsewhere, to return in the course of time in such a shape that her enemy would never know her and only *the faithful could recognise her. Masang had not forgotten this.*

Rani Gaidinliu's life sentence and imprisonment at such a tender age created a sensation. The late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru learnt about Gaidinliu and her movement when he visited Assam including the Surma Valley in 1937. At his initiative the Indian National Congress started making serious efforts for securing her release. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru requested Lady Astor, a reputed member of British Parliament to take up the matter with the (British) Secretary of State for India.

In her letter to Pandit Nehru in May 1939 Lady Astor stated that the Secretary of State for India turned down her request to release Gaidinliu as the British Government felt that 'The movement (of Jadonang and Gaidinliu) has not died down and would break out if she were released as she is at present considered a potent source of danger to the peace of Manipur State and the Province of Assam.'

She was however released from Tura jail in 1947 when India attained independence. But even in free India she was not immediately allowed to return to her home village in Manipur. On being freed from Tura jail she had to stay at Yimrap Mokokchung (Nagaland). After a few years she was allowed to return to her home village Longkao (Nungkao). She met President Rajendra Prasad at Imphal in 1953 and acquainted him with some of the

difficulties confronting the Zeliangrong people The Union Ministry of *Home Affairs sanctioned a political pension* for her from April 7, 1959

Rani Gaidinliu received a *Tamrapatra* on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Independence on recognition of her contribution as a distinguished freedom fighter in 1972

In 1959 she visited the Zeliangrong village of North Cachar Hills and Cachar and received tumultous welcome from her people But her efforts to unify the Zeliangrong Nagas incurred the displeasure of the Naga National Council led insurgents who had by then stirred and troubled the entire region covering the Naga Hills Manipur and North Cachar Hills but that is a separate story

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Part III

Other Uprisings in the Freedom Struggle

THE RAJ IN BURMA

S B CHAUDHURI

This article refers to the reactions of the people of Burma to the presence of the British in their country to draw attention to the similarities if any with the responses of the people of other Asiatic countries smarting under the impact of the colonial rule of Great Britain The British Empire expanded over Asia but it was the Empire of India that made Britain the greatest Asiatic power 'From India as Panikkar says a policy of imperial expansion was planned Ceylon Burma and Malacca fell in quick succession in the post-Napoleonic period mainly as a sequel to the India-based strength of Britain

The British annexed Burma in three instalments the long costal strips in 1824 the Irrawaddy delta in 1852 and Upper Burma in 1886 The motive for its conquest had come from India but the conquest was not the result of diplomatic intrigues carried out on the inner lines of the country for the Burmese gave no scope to the traders to work up their infiltration tactics as they did in India and always kept them at a safe distance The British missions sent on many occasions achieved no satisfactory result in the Court of Ava and usually met with rebuffs King Bodawpaya even favoured a scheme of forming a confederation of all the chief states of India to effect the expulsion of the foreigners The plan it is said considerably advanced Under the pretext of making pilgrimages to Gaya and Benares emissaries were sent to the Marathas and the Sikhs but the plan was frustrated by the British victory at Kirki and the routing of the Pindaris

Bodawpaya's successor Bagyidawpaya (1819 1837) served by the great Burmese general Maha Bandula was even more unbending in his attitude towards the British The contemptuous silence with which he treated all cases of British allegations of Burmese aggressions led to the First Burmese War (1824 1826) The

Burmese, however, were defeated, and the king of Burma had to surrender the provinces of Arakan, Tavoy, Tenasserim and Martaban and receive a resident British ambassador in his capital But the Burmese had never liked the idea of receiving an envoy in their city, and this became the subject of endless disputations The next king Tharrawaddi (1837 45) assumed a decidedly hostile attitude towards the British government ignoring the treaty of Yandabo and threatened to drive the English out of Arakan and Tenasserim His son Pagan Min (1845 52) similarly ignored the provisions of the treaty, and violated with impunity all restraints to his independent rule Thus a line of monarchs inspired by the love of freedom, had resisted the British occupation of the country with all their might The national sentiment thus roused up rendered the foreign rule in Burma a target of attack by every aspiring leader

But the British in Burma had no traditions of familiarity as in India It was at the high tide of British imperialism that Burma was annexed Confident of the superiority of their own institutions the British in Burma steered clear of all controversies and adopted an uncompromising attitude of imposing their own system In that way British influence had been the most disintegrating force which had ever been turned upon a 'tightly knit society' As Guy Wint writes

"The old society toppled down To describe the effects of British rule is thus from one aspect like making an inventory of one of the ancient cities of Germany after the allied air raids The main consequence was to destroy the discipline which Burmese society had evolved in itself for the control of the individual ' The rural headmen being set aside were replaced by government nominees of a non hereditary character foreign to the village In the absence of the natural leader the village failed to control its own people Free from any restriction under the new liberal regime, the peasant was now free to dispose of his land, the money lender to charge any interest he liked and the individual trader to import foreign goods at cheap rate to the village markets to the detriment of village handicrafts Thus the organic units of the Burmese villages were destroyed beyond recovery which account for the prevalence of crimes in Burma all throughout the British period and even now

The *Thugyi Rebellion at Sandoway* (1829 31) is a typical case of Burmese reaction to British rule A grievous assessment which was beyond the capacity of the country to bear the farming system and all other evils of the British revenue administration had their full share in causing this outbreak During the First Burmese War Sandoway was occupied without resistance on 30 April 1825 It was later on made the military headquarters and detachments of regular forces and a newly raised Mugh Levy were stationed there Even during the war the people were subjected to many harassing demands Each household was required to provide and maintain a pack of bullock and a driver for service with the army operating For the realisation of revenue, the *taiks* or circles were put up to action The thirty *thugyis* (circle headmen) who were appointed tendered to pay rupees 1 53 636 and to manufacture 43 940 maunds of salt which they were obliged to deliver to the government at a very cheap rate This monstrous demand on an undeveloped country proved a failure The *thugyis* could not honour their obligations even to half the extent by utmost exertion and some of them also absconded The people being subjected to senseless exactions were driven to migrate from the country which thus became depopulated By the middle of 1827 only about rupees 10 000 and 3 000 maunds of salt had been paid in The demand for the manufacture of salt was made practically nugatory by the fact that the price offered by the government at four annas a maund covered only half the cost of production In fact the industry flourished only some thirty years later when the price was twelve annas a maund

This being the situation the demand for revenue was reduced to rupees 56 274 and the price offered for salt was raised to seven annas per maund Yet the condition did not improve By the middle of 1828 the *thugyis* had paid only rupees 26 636 and the district officer by his personal exertions added a little more to the collection Local enquiry conducted during this time showed that the people had been despoiled to the extent of rupees 20 000 by the exactions of the *thugyis* under various devices and that the country was seething with discontent The government therefore adopted a new policy To eliminate speculative tendencies *thugyis* were replaced by hereditary men and a house-

tax was introduced in lieu of collections The house tax was levied at different rates by circles, but the experiment lasted only two years In 1829 the collections amounted to rupees 33,500, and in 1830 to rupees 37 617 The alarming feature was that the country had been so depleted of coins that 22 out of the 30 circles paid the tax in kind or in elephant tusks or gold and silver bullion Meanwhile, the country was in the grip of a rebellion

In 1829 Maung Tha U the *thugyi* of the hill circle of Alegyaw raised the standard of revolt The exploited villagers and other discontented elements rallied round him They all marched to Sandoway Captain Gordon in his attempt to repulse the invaders was killed in action The insurgents burned the police post and committed other depredations to such an extent that the inhabitants of many circles migrated to Ramree To check their depredations the Mugh and the Arakan provincial battalions were deployed at various centres The difficult nature of the country impeded military activities The insurrection lasted till the end of 1830 when it was finally stamped out Maung Tha U fled away and later on died With his death the rebellion collapsed Sporadic attempts to stir up disaffection were made by a *pongyi* in 1831 by posing himself as a *mintaung* or embryo king but he could not make much headway

Similar scenes were being enacted at Tavoy and Mergui in Tenasserim The establishment of the British government involving the overthrow of many old functionaries rendered large bodies of people very much disaffected and they wanted to get back their former position Mung da, the former governor of Tavoy at the head of about five hundred men made a bid for the capture of the city in 1831 He even obtained a brief spell of success and occupied the city but it was very soon recovered by British troops strengthened by reinforcements from Moulmein Arakan was also in a very disturbed state for several years after it became a British territory in 1826 Within two years the establishment of a native dynasty was plotted for The leaders were Aung Gyaw Ri and Aung Gyaw Sin who were holding appointments under the government They tampered with the men of the local battalion and finally organised a rebellion in 1836 which was suppressed before it assumed formidable proportions

But the revolt of Gaung Gyi (1853 58) and the series of distur-

bances which broke out in its sequel at Tharrawaddy in 1853 and which lasted till his death in 1858 afforded perhaps the most formidable case of internal disturbance during the early period of British rule in Burma Tharrawaddy had always been a disturbed district under the Burmese At the time of the occupation of the district by British arms a local struggle was going on between four armed parties for the possession of the administration of townships and for the right of collecting revenues The origin of this insurrection is no doubt to be traced to the lawless habits of the people but the establishment of the British power which constituted a challenge to the position of the rival chieftains and thwarted their ambition led to a series of violent explosions of a popular character aiming at the overthrow of the newly established government

One very remarkable feature about these anti British risings was that the priesthood in Burma or the *pongyis* as they were called, had always taken a very active part in fomenting disaffection Their hold over the people was unquestioned whom they led in many encounters against the British They also stirred up tremendous upsurge by posing as a *mintaung* or embryo king These mendicant-impostors impersonated the late king as the case may be and represented to the people that they had come back to life again to deliver the country from the bondage of foreign rule The history of the reception of the Raj in Burma is full of a series of insurrections of an unending chain of *mintaungs*

Thus commotions stirred up by pretenders were of frequent occurrences when Salween became a British territory after the Second Burmese War A Karen who called himself a *mintaung* the incarnation of a prince collected a rabble of 1 500 men and plunged the country into a state of anarchy Similarly in Syriam there were numerous outbreaks and even more seriously sustained rebellions Bassein was captured on 18 April 1852 but the country was torn asunder by factious feuds between the British and anti British parties Even villages had been destroyed merely because they supplied fuel to the steamers and none dared to accept office under the new government At last in January 1854 a rebellion broke out The rebels Shwe Htu and Kyaw Zan Hla proclaimed on the alleged authority of Ava that they had been

commissioned to drive out the English In the initial stages the movement gained strength the upper part of the district fell into the hands of the rebels but the insurrection was however crushed later on by the gallant exertions of army officers like Fytche Baker and Shufdham Again in *1857* the Karens took up arms against the British authority in Martaban They were led by a disaffected leader of the Karen country who assumed the title of *mutaing* In the legendary lore of the Karens it was predicted that such a person would appear amongst them who after driving out the Kalas or foreigners would establish his authority People believed in his divine mission and flocked under his banner to the number of 1 500 The rebels secured some British outposts and committed excesses but the rising was speedily suppressed by the deputy commissioners Major Berdmore and Lieut Sladen Another such movement originated in Bassein the Rising of Nga Kyaw Tha in 1868 which attempted to gain royal power in the name of the king of Burma

In Bassein the period of the Third Burmese War was marked as elsewhere by a general outbreak Numerous dacoity gangs operated but generally speaking the character of these insurrectionary *movements in Bassein was more distinctly political than* any that had occurred in the Irrawaddy division In the early part of 1886 the district was entirely out of the hand of the government and the people thought that British rule would soon be at an end The most formidable insurrection was what came to be known as the *Bogale rising* of February 1886 which soon spread into an open revolt and affected the neighbouring district of Maubin It was a serious uprising the rebels were fighting on king Thibaw's behalf and went about plundering villages collecting money and enlisting recruits

In fact the annexation of Upper Burma was the signal for general conflagration throughout the Lower Burma districts Adventurers priests and pretenders all made a bid for overthrowing foreign rule At the end of 1885 shortly after the expedition to Mandalay there occurred what is called the *Shwegyin rebellion* It appears that the people of Lower Burma refused to believe the news of the king's deposition and were in a somewhat excited state The rebellion was headed by a Shan called the Myaneaung Ponga in the name of the king of Burma and its

most serious effects were felt in what now forms part of the Thaton district

The rebellion of the year 1888 led by Bo Naa Ta was also a very well organised one The Shans and the Burmese made common cause under the leadership of Bo Naa to attain political ends Even the *pongyis* went about the country tattooing men to render them gun proof Again in 1891 Paw Aung, a leader of consequence stirred up a commotion Similarly in Sandoway the *pongyis* broke out in a fierce rebellion in 1890, and, supported by the people over whom they exercised great influence, effectively challenged British civil administration

All these instances of anti foreign movements tend to show that the projection of British power in Burma provoked the national spirit of the Burmese to resist the presence of these foreign and intrusive elements in their country The resistance was quick and instant in all the different phases of the conquest of Burma in 1824 1852 and 1881 the subjugation by a foreign power being quite an alien feature in the historical milieu of the Burmese whose love of freedom of the country received inspiration from certain religious pretences and prejudices to which the people were very sensitive like the people of other neighbouring countries Thus the part played by the *mintaungs* in Burma bears a sort of family likeness with the revolt of Nicapeti the mendicant impostor (1617) who impersonated the late king of Ceylon and assured the people that he had come back to life again to deliver the country from the bondage of the Portuguese

In India however the impact of British colonial power came in the wake of trade and other allied activities of a company of merchants who for some time even appeared as a country-power of India The policy of annexation followed later on was camouflaged in such a way that it took some time for the people to realise that the country was being subjugated This may explain why the political issue the expulsion of the foreigners was not very much articulate in the anti British risings in India in the pre mutiny period But the attack on Burma was straight and direct In Burma Britain did not require any early preparation to annex the country However whatever may be the nature of these disturbances the reception accorded to the Raj both in Burma and India was marked by the same innate hostility to the

presence of the foreign power as in other Asiatic countries It is obvious that the people of Burma kept up a sequence of stern opposition to British rule even up to 1890

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SAYA SAN REBELLION

BEJOY SEN

> In the history of India s struggle for freedom the Tharrawaddy Rebellion in Burma, a massive revolt in what was then part of India, is commonly overlooked In magnitude of suffering, loss of life and the success attained, it is a very close second to the great upheaval of 1857, that well-nigh snapped the chains that held India in bondage '

The Burmese rebellion of 1929 32 was one of the gravest that Britain had to face in its administration of India" and it was characterised as "the second front" in the struggle The rebellion in official history is known as the 'Tharrawaddy' rebellion but more popularly it is known as the Saya San rebellion after the name of its chief architect and martyr It is also known as the greatest peasant revolt of our times"

What is the back drop of this great rebellion? Agriculture was the main livelihood of the vast majority of the Burmese people During the time of the Burmese Kings export of rice was forbidden The main source of royal revenue was the basic household tax usually amounting to about 15 per cent of the annual crop output The colonialist however completely upset the self sufficient village economy and started to plunder by way of export of rice timber etc This was the beginning of the process of classical colonial exploitation reducing the economy to exporting of agricultural products to and importing of manufactured goods from the imperialist countries The opening of the Suez Canal (1869) made the country an appendage to the economy of the West The traditional social and economic system was upset and imported items replaced goods of traditional Burmese manufacture The boom collapsed in 1905 07 and world depression found the Burmese peasantry expropriated from their land holdings Then came World War I and it precipitated a near paralysis of the rice industry Export of rice and other agricultural products was entirely in the hands of British

firms—Bulloc Brothers Steel Brothers etc There was the Bul linger Pool (1921)—a private agreement between four Principal European rice exporting firms to observe a common policy and maintain their monopoly Exploitation of Burma s national pro ducts like teak oil mineral products etc were firmly in the grip of British monopoly houses Save and except oil no basic industry was developed in Burma and British policy kept the Burma as drawers of water and hewers of wood Even on the labour front the Burman was denied opportunity Indian la bour was cheaper and through the notorious Maistry System" Indian labour was imported in large numbers before the influx of pauperised Burmese peasants to cities for jobs The Burman had no entry to factories dockyards and railways The paupen sed peasants soon fell a prey to usurious money lenders who were mainly South Indian Chettiyars and became labourers on their former land now held by the new Chettiyar landlords The price of rice progressively declined from Rs 202 per 100 baskets in 1926 to a mere Rs 77 in 1931 the latter price being less than even the production cost

By 1929 the Provincial Co operative Central Bank became in solvent and the co operative operation collapsed During the period 1929 34 almost 2 million acres of Lower Burma paddy land passed into the hands of non resident Chettiyar money lenders A large percentage of land went out of cultivation The situation for peasants became desperate Almost the entire rural population were hopelessly in debt Thus an all pervasive economic crisis fuelled the already wounded national feeling and the impact was profound and devastating

Rumblings of national feeling can be traced from the time of the British conquest Through three successive wars the in dependent Kingdom of Burma was conquered by the Britishers To add insult to injury the country was made an appendage to the British Indian Empire and from February 26 1886 was ruled from the Indian capital—an affront to the Burmese national sentiment The patriotic soldiers and officers of Burma s army refused to surrender and escaped into thick jungles From there they carried on widespread guerilla warfare Within four months of subjugation in June 1886 rebellion broke out and at tained the proportion of a national uprising Practically every

household had at least one male member joining a rebel group Military posts and convoys were attacked In the southern Shan states the Shans continued the fight under Limbin confederacy The Chins in the hills resisted the best British troops The peasants of Lower Burma rose in rebellion The British had to employ a 40 000 strong army for nearly five years to suppress popular revolts but the embers of revolt never actually died Radical Burmese nationalism had over its history sometimes erupted in violence and sometimes remained dormant but at no time did it accept constitutional politics as a means of anti imperialist struggle Following this heritage Saya San rebellion was essentially a resurgence of militant nationalism and it deserves a distinguished place in the history of colonial liberation struggles

The Government of India Act 1919 left Burma out of its purview and paradoxically ushered in the nationalist revival with the emergence of GCBA and Wunthanu movements The shoe question had already hurt Burmese sentiments The University Boycott movement and the movement to run the national schools accelerated the momentum of the national upsurge But the British rulers temporarily succeeded in blunting the edge of the nationalist upsurge by roping in a section of the leaders of the movement into collaborationist and constitutional channels In accordance with the Montagu Chelmsford reforms Burma was made a province of the Indian Empire to be ruled by a British Governor with a Legislative Council in a pattern known as Dyarchy The periodical elections resulted in scrambles for office through unprincipled and shifting alignments

Ultimately the GCBA broke up With the advent of Rev Ottama [10] Burmese politics again began to be galvanised and a no-tax campaign started Wisara [11] a Burmese monk died of hunger strike in jail and with the ceremonial cremation of the martyrs body popular excitement mounted Student disaffection burst when Buddhist students struck at three Missionery schools in Rangoon protesting against compulsory attendance at Bible classes The Boycott movement against the Simon Commission and the agitation against payment of capitation tax spread In 1929 Mahatma Gandhi visited Burma In 1930 J M Sengupta's trial in Burma ended in his conviction There was a growing threat of convergence of the liberation struggles of the two coun

tries, India and Burma For the imperialists the most alarming prospect was the impact it may have on the armed forces British control and administration of Burma was effected through large scale deployment of Indian sepoys police, Indian bureaucrats and clerks and Indian labourers To sow estrangement, racial hostilities were engineered in the form of Indo-Burmese riots The British rulers knew that the Indian army was the chief instrument of British rule in Burma and it was essential to insulate this force from the influence of nationalism The gamble started on May 8 1930 when a section of dock workers belonging to Andhra community struck work for better wages Burmese labourers were brought in on a temporary basis as strike breakers On May 26 the Andhra workers returned to work and the Burmese recruits were summarily dismissed The dismissed Burmese workers became infuriated Incitement followed and fighting spread Rangoon city except the posh areas was allowed to be ransacked by hooligans for two days On June 24 there was a mutiny in Rangoon Central jail where the prisoners attacked the Jail Superintendent an Indian Military security police all Indians indulged in indiscriminate shooting killing three and wounding sixty Burmese prisoners These events further inflamed feelings on both sides The riots spread to interior regions The whole country was about to plunge into a racial blood bath and the main anti imperialist political struggle was threatened to be eclipsed

The genius Saya watched the events as he went on with his secret preparation to give a revolutionary direction to the mass discontent It was at this crucial moment and at his initiative that the great storm of Tharrawaddy Rebellion burst sweeping away racial and communal venoms The revolt came as the culmination of progressively rising popular discontent with British policies and imperialist exploitation It was not a sudden spontaneous outburst By 1930, explosive material for a mass upheaval was ready only a spark was needed Forceful collection of capitation tax at Tharrawaddy provided the spark and the peasantry's resistance under Saya San's leadership soon assumed the form of mass rebellion against the British rule

On the night of October 28 1930 Saya San went with a small entourage of faithful followers to Mya Sein-Taung Nyo pagoda in Insein district a half-hour's drive from Rangoon and got him-

self crowned as King of Burma On December 10, the acting Governor, a Burman Sir Maung Gyi held a Durbar in Tharrawaddy He threatened that collection of capitation tax would be punctual and, if necessary, forceful This was the signal for the beginning of the rebellion On December 21, Saya San gathered his men on Alam Taung hill near Tharrawaddy, seventy-five miles away from Rangoon, the Headquarter of British power in Burma Saya San styled himself Thupanaka Galon Raja and called his men the Galon army He ordered his troops to march and hurl the British into the sea whence they first came The Galon army began only with 30 guns On December 22, the Galon army swooped down from the hills The first encounters were at Phar-Shew Kya village where several hundred men of the Galon army, dressed in their black jackets and baggy pants, armed with swords and spears attacked the police Several police officers were killed Victory in the first round went to the Galon army On December 24 Saya San's troops surrounded the dak-bunglow at We village and killed an Englishman The rebellion gained intensity and spread to wide regions from Tharrawaddy to Prome Insein, Thayet Yamethin Toungoo Myingyan and across the Irrawaddy to Henzada Pyapon Dedaye and the districts of Irrawaddy Delta By June 1931 almost the entire Lower Burma was in turmoil and the rebellion reached its peak Sir Charles Innes hurried back to resume his Governorship terminating his 'sick leave' and found on his return a full scale war on his hands A few thousand Galon troops under the leadership of Saya San Aung Hla Myat Aung and others engaged the police and the regular troops such as 2/15th Punjab Rifles Reinforcements consisting of two divisions of troops mainly of the Marathas and the Dogras and aeroplanes were rushed from India From time to time further fresh troops had to be imported into Burma from India

The British Government poured immense supplies of men money and arms into the country to suppress the rebellion Worst forms of brutalities were perpetrated in the process On January 31 1931 an Ordinance was promulgated for a speedy trial of the captured leaders and mention was made of the association of Bengal revolutionaries with whom contact had already been established Twelve Bengalees were arrested from different parts of Burma of whom two were clerks from the office of Port Com-

missioners, two school teachers, six at Rangoon and one each from Insein and Yamethin In April 1931, a young Bengali was sentenced to 3 years hard labour for distributing inflammatory leaflets urging the people to get rid of the British by all means Investigations disclosed close connections between the young man and Bengal revolutionaries Although the Bengal revolutionaries had nothing to do with the Tharawaddy rebellion, which was an entirely indigenous happening—their moral support was a nightmare to the British rulers and caused constant fear

Editors and publishers of two vernacular papers in Rangoon were arrested and convicted Criminal law amendment act of 1931 was enacted empowering arrests without warrants and providing for summary trials Besides military operations gagging the press, and unleashing a regime of terror continued Stern action was taken against villagers suspected of harbouring or assisting the rebels in any way Any person with tattooed markings was arrested and scores were detained under strict surveillance or deported to places far away and held in detention in special camps There was a kind of martial law prevailing all over the country and the Secret Service was given a free hand Burning of villages, massacring villagers, committing of most inhuman atrocities on those captured was the order of the day On June 13 1931 in a serious engagement 22 insurgents were killed Sixteen severed heads from these dead bodies were stuck on the ends of poles and paraded through the villages to terrorise the people The heads were then brought to Prome and kept on show for public view for days together Besides this to drive the lesson home, heads of fallen rebels were displayed at police stations

These brutal methods could not cow down the spirit of Saya San s rebel army The Galon Army was armed with primitive weapons, a supreme confidence in the cause charms and amulets which were supposed to confer immunity from the bullet and the bayonet Into the battle the Galon soldiers would march, beating their gongs waving their banners chanting their songs brandishing their swords On the other side were the well-armed police, and still better-armed regular army troops The rebellion was an act of deep faith and great courage In the forest fastness at Alantaung was set up a "palace and it served as the

rebel headquarters with a central organisation and centralised leadership exercising control A special communication sent to the Shan chiefs soliciting their cooperation on the basis of the new leader's ardent desire to advance religion and the nation An army of Shans with modern weapons was drilled and indoctrinated Among those enlisted in support of the new jungle king were the magicians with their protective medicines and the practitioners of tattooing Most of the organisers under Saya San were political phongies (Buddhist monks) who captured all the local Wunthanen Athens These were the village grassroot associations which functioned as if they were the village councils and dealt with all local problems

To understand the role of the political phongies in Saya San rebellion one has to know the status they have in the Burmese society The monks are persons who renounce the mundane world and take to yellow robe and residence in monastery They had to live on alms cooked food collected from door to door in a daily round They were influential and they touched virtually all elements of the population and they were revered by the people They had close links with the people and their advice was solicited regarding various local affairs At the age of eight years Burmese youth were sent to the monastery for Shinpyn ceremony and this was compulsory The sons of the rich and the poor enjoyed the same status at the monastery

The Burmese people looked upon the king as the promoter and defender of the Buddhist faith and the Burmese Kings as a rule used to bestow lavish patronage on Buddhist shrines and monastic orders British authority failed to qualify as a promoter of the faith and this resulted in the impoverishment of those who depended on the ruler's patronage The phongies felt that their whole future was threatened and they played an important role in spreading hatred against the foreign rule The expansion of British administration and its penetration into all walks of Burmese life contributed to the break up of the social order closely sustained by this monastic order There was a general fear that with the spread of English education and the Christian missionary activity encouraged by the Government Burma's religion and traditions were in danger and this fear played an important role in turning the people against British rule What alarmed the Burmese most was the rapid and large-scale conversion of ethnic

minorities into Christianity Preference was given to Christians in all jobs and education Even a law was enacted which enabled a convert to Christianity to inherit his ancestral property

Saya San himself was an ex-phongyi and knew the problems of the people As a matter of fact Saya San was a man of small build with the brows of a dreamer and the mouth of a soldier, a man of sensitive feeling but inflexible will A man of many names and many parts, alchemist teacher, preacher, politician, practitioner of indigenous medicine—Saya San had considerable influence and following in Tharrawaddy and neighbouring districts although originally he belonged to Shwebo, Upper Burma the home of Alung Paya the great Burmese King and founder of the last Burmese dynasty and the place from where most of the recruits to the army of Burmese Kings came He had spent a considerable part of his life in Lower Burma in Siam and had authored a widely circulated book describing traditional medical nostrums After a long spell of itinerary life he settled down in Tharrawaddy He started with the GCBA where he was a member of the Executive Committee He had headed a committee which investigated the plight of the peasants He had seen and felt the appaling poverty and hopelessness of the villagers in many Lower Burma districts that he visited In 1928 he severed his connection with GCBA He conceived the idea of rebellion and for this purpose plunged into organising secret societies He would move with the speed of a shooting star infusing courage into drooping hearts, finding new recruits and fighting equipment For his power of elusiveness and acquiring various aliases he was the "Scarlet Pimpernel of the Burmese Revolution

'Invulnerable' tattooing was no protection against the modern firearms which the Britishers used but it did not cause collapse of the rebel army On the contrary the rebel army broke up into several large groups and continued resistance from their jungle hideouts On December 3 1930 there was a bloody fight lasting for nearly two hours at Paswegyan and there was heavy loss on both sides On December 29 1930, the rebel army 200 in strength engaged the regular army at Udokwin On January 1 1931 the rebel headquarters was stormed On January 4 1931 at Yamethin under the command of a phongyi recently arrived from Saya San's headquarters, there was a bloody skirmish and 39 rebels laid down their lives A more formidable encounter,

the preparations for which had been made by Saya San himself began in Pyapon district on January 7 1931 Seven hundred men armed only with dahs and spears advanced on the police contingent in a solid phalanx Fighting continued for hours Several score were killed and the remaining 600 men were rounded up There was terrible bloodshed on both sides Of the numerous grim events of the rebellion only a few have been told and retold By their courage and sacrifice in an unequal battle the Burmese peasants wrote a glorious chapter in the history of the Burmese people

Increased rebel activity was noticeable in frequent dislocation of railway traffic On March 1 1931 dynamite was used to blow up bridges and railway lines Night train service had to be totally stopped and in the day time trains were run under armed protection There were several jail breaks and the happenings were declared to be a situation of great peril The rebellion spread to Shan states also and there was a pitched battle at Pingbaw On October 24 there was a bitter fight when Saya San's Tiger Army was surrounded by two platoons Two leaders Bo Po Htun and Bo Ta Pung died fighting In an encounter on October 27 two leaders Saya Chit and Yon Gyi Aung were killed On 27th November San Gya a leader of great prominence was killed in action On December 27 th Lion Army was attacked and prominent leaders were killed On January 22 1931 Bo Gyaw a leader of Henzada district was shot dead by the military police On April 15 Bo We another leader was shot dead The leaders of the rebellion were either shot dead or relentlessly hunted down

A reward of Rs 5 000 was offered for the capture of Saya San dead or alive When things became hopeless in the plains Saya San moved into the hills disguised as a monk as his stay in Tharrawaddy became absolutely unsafe After many narrow escapes he arrived at Loi Kaw in Shan states and continued his struggle as best as he could under the assumed name of Phongyi Nyana Saya San then fell ill with an attack of malaria A wound in his leg reduced his mobility Nevertheless he kept on stubbornly hoping to cross the border into China in search of arms and aid Incidentally it may be mentioned here the Chinese Communist centre in Shanghai had sent agents to Burma

They made little headway and four were deported A red flag was found in a captured rebel camp in 1931 (*The Times* August 20, 1930, January 2, 1931) Saya San was now fighting against heavy odds totally isolated from his people On August 2, 1931 a Phongyi was arrested near Hopho village in Naung Khio township in an exhausted condition with five followers Later this Phongyi was identified as no other than the much sought after rebel Saya San himself He was kept for one night at Hokho, securely chained and taken to Hsipaw Under heavy guard and in heavy chains he was taken in a train from Hsipaw to Tharrawaddy Shan peasants numbering 2 000 gathered at the police station to see Saya San being taken away The older peasants wept

To get an idea of the sweep and intensity of the rebellion The facts may be better stated in terms of figures The rebellion swept the land for about 1½ years from December 1930 to mid 1932 affecting about 20 000 sq miles By June 1931 over 8,000 and by September another 3 600 regular government troops were engaged The regular British armies deployed against the rebels included the 2nd Manchester Regiment Punjab Regiment Nizam's Infantry Brigade 2 5 Maharatta Regiment Baluchi Battalion and two Divisions of the Dogra Regiment In addition the Army Signal Corps and support of military aircraft were also provided According to official figures 3 000 rebels were killed or wounded 8 300 people were arrested Death penalty was imposed on 274 persons and 535 were given life sentence including deportation to Andamans Ninety eight associations and organisations were banned

On August 15, 1931 Saya San was brought before the court of Special tribunal The charge against him was conspiracy and waging war against the King Emperor Saya San's answer was that he was not guilty On August 30-31 after a short trial Saya San the great leader was sentenced to death The High Court promptly confirmed the sentence scornfully remarking that Saya San was a desperado Saya San's reaction was 'so many of my associates and followers have been killed or hanged I should also go their way" On Saturday November 18 1931 at dawn Saya San was hanged in Tharrawaddy jail He went up the gallows with head erect and waved good bye to those who had to be pre

sent at the execution Outside the jail a few thousand people wai ted hoping to get a last glimpse of the leader They had a brief look when the body was taken away and his body was buried in an unknown grave Just before his execution Saya San gave a small sum of money to start a Library This was done and stock ed with leftist literature

Saya San s righthand man U Aung Hla was also tried by a spe cial tribunal which gave him life sentence But the High Court on revision set aside the sentence and enhanced it to death such was British Justice U Aung Hla and his son were hanged the same morning on opposite gallows

Suppression of the rebellion by military force was followed by a policy of pacification through creating constitutional illusions and pursuing a divide and rule policy which yielded rich divi dends In the 15 affected districts land revenue was reduced by one tenth to one third Forcible collection of loan and taxes was stopped Two million rupees were advanced as agricultural loans A general amnesty was offered Reputable phongyi lea ders cooperation was obtained and the hard core of revolutionary vanguard—the political phongyis—was decimated and politically immobilized The Legislative Council of Burma denounced the atrocities committed by the Government while suppressing the re bellion demanded general amnesty opposed the setting up of a Special Tribunal to try captured rebel leaders and approved a resolution calling for public examination of the causes of the Saya San rebellion for review of judgements as against the British argument that Saya San simply wanted to be a king The British colonialists wooed the elite of the Burmese society and set up commissions and select committees Round Table Conferences were convened to strike a deal with the elite section of the Bur mese society To London therefore the politicians were in vited They were invited often during the few years that follow ed the Saya San rebellion They went in bigger delegations Even U Chit Hlaing the great boycotter at last became interested and went to London with his friends The newspapers reported the d velopments of the rebellion but the editorials were careful Political parties were quick to declare that they had nothing to do with the rebellion On January 19 1932 Prime Minister Mac donald made the following statement Now the people of Burma will be in a position to decide whether or not they are in favour

of separation from India His Majesty s Government consider that the decision might best be taken (by London) after a general election at which the broad issue had been placed before the electorate"

This move to submit the issue of separation from India to a *general vote was an act of master statesmanship on the part of* British rulers It enabled them to take effective advantage of the divergence and rivalries within the nationalist movement Further, the issue clouded the entire political horizon and managed to keep the educated middle class students and other political forces channelized into the path of constitutional reforms whereas Says San had lit the beacon light that had illumined the Burmese independence

In November 1932, the elections were held 'The political events of 1931 1932 contributed much to bridge the gap between the elite nationalist leadership of the Legislative Council on the one hand and the grass-roots politicians and the boycotting GCBA on the other This is a clear picture how the Burmese bourgeoisie exploited the political situation to obtain concessions and how the British rulers masterminded the situation to lure it into political collaboration so that the flame of revolution might be extinguished The British Government was dumbfounded by the 1932 election which voted against separation and refused to accept it In July 1933, the matter was referred to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament which submitted its Report in 1934 It recommended Burma's separation from India and brought out a white paper On May 30, 1935 Burma's new constitution was announced Thus six valuable years since the outbreak of Saya San rebellion were utilized to divert the revolutionary flame The dominant moderate leadership in effective control of national politics at that time veered round to increasing cooperation with the rulers And this was an important factor for the ultimate failure of the Saya San rebellion The basic programme and leadership of the mass movement which surfaced in the subsequent stage in the national movement were very much absent at the time the Saya San rebellion had broken out One can come to the conclusion that the rebellion failed because of objective and subjective factors beyond the control of the great Saya San and it was not his individual failing

THE LESSONS

The political significance of the rebellion was far-reaching Although the famous British historian Harvey in *British Rule in Burma* attributed the cause of the rebellion to superstition pure and simple spread by an ex monk who claimed magical powers, to a common Burman Saya San became the "intrepid spirit, the embodiment of physical courage and hardihood' Saya San breathed new vitality into Burmese nationalism and the rebellion not only constituted an important landmark in the development of Burmese nationalism but it was a turning point in the struggle for freedom Armed revolt was firmly put on the agenda

The Burmese people looked upon kingship as the traditional symbol of Burma s independence, sovereignty and political unity That is the reason why Saya San crowned and proclaimed himself king, to become the great symbol of the revolt The peasants declared loyalty to him and with that single act, they had transferred revolt into a revolutionary war If Saya San had not proclaimed himself the King the uprising would have gone down in history as merely a peasants revolt of economic origin But Saya San gave it political content Therefore the monarchical or feudal character of the revolt should not be stressed overmuch

Yet another significance of the rebellion was the shake-up of the government prestige at the village level The authority of the headman was impaired and the British administration at its root was eroded for all time and this led to the rapid growth of a militant national movement The rebellion demonstrated that as against superior arms, the weapons of courage and determination were a no mean force

A special significance of Sava San rebellion had been lost in the womb of history The rebellion came at a time when the entire political horizon of Burma was overshadowed and clouded by the one and only issue, viz whether Burma was to be separated from India as an administrative unit (Burma was at that time ruled as a province of India) and ruled by Britain direct from London instead of Delhi The political atmosphere was so much worked up that constitutionalism became the order of the day The political leaders thought only in terms of loaves and fishes of office that would accrue on separation It was Sava San who in

one stroke focussed the real issue before the country—that the issue was not separation from India but ending of British rule in Burma which was to be achieved not by constitutional begging but by an armed upheaval All glory goes to Saya San for being the first man to differ qualitatively from other contemporary nationalist politicians

Saya San's movement also differed from the spontaneous anti alien riots which the chauvinist politicians engineered with the instigation of British ruling circles The main political objectives were about to recede but Saya San's rebellion steered the simmering national anger to the path of armed struggle against the British Its achievements were to serve as a base and inspiration for the more vigorous national movement of the future

The principal object of the Saya San rebellion was to restore Burma's ancient monarchy and that became the fundamental cause of failure of the rebellion It fought for a lost cause viz the reestablishment of the old feudal order No rebellion could restore it The exploited class namely the peasantry had to come out of its old social order and on its debris had to build up a new order in alliance with other progressive forces A politically conscious general staff which could lead and unite various forces into a broad anti imperialist national front was yet to emerge The British colonialists helped to destroy the old feudal order but at the same time struck a compromise with a section of the feudal class in order that it could carry on its exploitation

In all subsequent national movements the emergent middle class spearheaded by the students played a leading role in the anti British freedom fight The same student community however stayed aloof from the Saya San Rebellion What could be the cause? The middle class to which the student community mainly belonged sympathized with that part of the objective of Saya San Rebellion namely the overthrow of the British Raj—it couldn't sympathize with the other part namely the restoration of the old monarchy and appeal to superstitions The merchants and traders did not give supplies to the rebels as their profits came from economic connection with the British merchants In other words the Burmese masses were disunited and deprived of a conscious revolutionary leadership which could unite and lead all anti imperialist classes including the peasants in the struggle for independence No wonder therefore that in spite of largescale

participation of the peasantry the rebellion did not succeed The Saya San rebellion started with a no tax campaign but it did not come out of its narrow limits and popularize the charter of demands which could galvanize the peasantry and other revolutionary classes On top of everything was the declared aim of restoration of kingship which itself was based on exploitation of the peasantry The entire movement lacked a unified forward looking programme which could galvanize all anti imperialist forces of the country

The revolt couldn t embrace the entire country or all the groups and classes of the Burmese society This disunity proved to be fatal to the rebellion The rebel leaders lacked coordination common plan of action and failed to evolve unity of action Once they overthrew British power from an area they did not know what sort of power to install in its place They became petty local warlords themselves and failed to function as liberators Saya San himself was not a military genius The fighting force lacked arms and depended more on tattoos and charms which were supposed to confer invulnerability to bullets

The betrayal of a section of the leadership also brought quicker downfall Another lesson we should draw from the rebellion Gen Newin said "is that those who wield power must always be on guard against its corruptive influence Leaders of the Saya San rebellion began well in all true sincerity In later stages corruption set in among some leaders They took to themselves many wives or queens as they called them and collected tolls and tributes from the villagers They rolled in wealth and luxury turning their backs on their cause

The British rulers ably exploited the racial antagonism which the leaders of the rebellion failed to see In the key center of Thartawaddy town volunteers were recruited by the British from the Karens (an ethnic minority) and effectively used them against the rebellion The Karens also provided the most loyal element in the British army that was raised in Burma The British rulers were successful in setting one indigenous race against the other In fact Saya Sans retreat to the Shan states was fatal because the Shan rulers as well as the Shan peasants were not friendly to his movement The Britishers had successfully sown the seeds of racial discord between the Burmese and the Shans In later years U Aung San the Father of the Burmese Nation foresaw

that the key to the politics of Burma was its national unity embracing all ethnic minorities which he successfully forged in the freedom fight that wrested independence from colonial yoke. The leaders of Saya San rebellion had not that vision and left it with its inherent weakness.

Despite being crushed the revolt shook the confidence of the Englishman on his power and alerted him about any united national movement. He became more suspicious and distrustful of the Burmans and had less and less social contact with them. The Englishman started placing more reliance on the other indigenous races. The Burman was debarred from being recruited in the Army. The policy of Divide and Rule became the sheet anchor of the administration. The arrogance of the Englishman over the Burmans increased and consequently, the unpopularity of British rule also increased. The post-Saya San period witnessed emergence of a nefarious and diabolical imperialist policy which had its parallel in India, Ireland and the African countries.

At the point of time when Saya San rebellion broke out the Burmese petty-bourgeoisie could never dream of throwing off the mighty British yoke, break away from the Empire and wrest independence from the British. All that they dreamt was to extract concessions within the ambit of British rule. No wonder therefore that this class remained a passive onlooker of the great upheaval. The rebels of 1930 proved to be more farsighted, showed more instinctive understanding of the evils of foreign rule and the imperative need to get rid of it than the petty-bourgeois class.

However the Saya San rebellion opened the eyes of the middle class political leaders about the potential strength of the peasantry and the need to reinforce their respective political parties with the backing of the rural masses. Hereafter the peasants began to be a part of the struggle for freedom.

The central lesson of the rebellion was that militancy had to be the key note of any liberation struggle and that lesson was richly applied by Burmese patriots in their subsequent struggles. The flood-gates of militant national movement opened up and the constitutionalists remained submerged in the stormy scene of Burmese political struggle for national liberation. The Saya San rebellion was the first organised uprising against the British. It made the Burmese feel and behave like freemen although they

were still under a foreign power The myth of British invincibility was exploded People had been aroused from their century old slumber It made the issue of nationalism a dominant one in Burmese life

The ruthless way in which the uprising was crushed lived in the memory of the Burmese for generations afterwards and fuelled the mounting hatred against the British rulers It is a glorious landmark in Burmese history It served as a perennial source of inspiration in Burma's struggle for freedom

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GLOSSARY

1 Tharrawaddy Headquarters of a district of the same name in Burma
2 Saya—Honorofic Suffix of the name and San means teacher or doctor
Maistri A sort of Sardar entrusted by the industrial management to supply cheap labour usually indentured from the poor districts of Andhra Pradesh
3 Chettyar Usurious Tamil money lenders who set up extensive business in the Burmese countryside
4 *Shans* An ethnic minority living in the north-eastern part of Burma bordering China
5 Chins Another ethnic minority of the same racial stock as the Mizos of N E India
6 GCBA General Council of Burmese Association first national organisation
7 Wunthanu Means Nationalist Similar to Swadeshi Movement ie to use indigenous goods only
8 Shoe Question Europeans insisted entering into Pagoda precincts with footwear which is sacrilegeous to Buddhism
9 U Ottama A veteran Buddhist priest turned militant nationalist
10 U Wisara A Buddhist monk who participated in politics died in jail resorting to hunger strike

PHADKE

CHINMOHAN
SEHANAVIS

Vasudeo Balvant Phadke's life span was short—barely 38 years (1845-83)—but its significance in the history of our freedom movement is in some respects unique and far reaching. Thousands of Indians fought and laid down their lives in the struggle against the British rule before and after him. Yet he remains a pioneer the distinctive character of whose contribution to our freedom struggle has to be assessed on the occasion of the centenary of his martyrdom (February 17, 1883). This is an attempt in that direction in the background of some important landmarks of his life and activities.

Phadke came of a fairly affluent landlord family settled at a village Shirdhon in Kolaba district of Maharashtra. The Phadkes were orthodox Chitpavan Brahmins—the highest in the caste hierarchy of Maharashtra. Vasudeo was of a deeply religious turn of mind and at one time had even thought of taking to Sannyasa. Later however he changed his mind and married at the age of 14. And when his wife died leaving a daughter behind he married again at the age of 28 a second wife who outlived him.

A few years before his first marriage Phadke had been sent to a primary school at Kalyan. As he wanted to learn English he joined an English school conducted by a missionary without the knowledge of his orthodox father. After finishing his primary education in 1859 he managed to persuade his father to allow him to continue his studies at secondary schools in Bombay and later on in Pune. After two years he left the school. Though he did not appear at the final examination he acquired meanwhile sufficient knowledge of English to enable him to get clerical jobs successively at the Audit Office of G.I.P. Railways, Grant Medical College in Bombay and finally in

1865 at Military Finance Office at Pune under the Controller of Military Finance

How a person with such a social background—of landlord and orthodox Chitpavan Brahmin origin and at the personal level having some English education and a steady government job—could in course of a few years turn into a revolutionary pioneer is a question to which no ready answer is available Valentine Chirol, of course held that the Chitpavan Brahmins were the bearers of an unbroken tradition of hatred towards the British rule and Curzon suspected educated Hindu middle class youths of Bengal as subversive and seditious Such dyed in the wool imperialist rantings apart it is true that later day Indian politicians in general—Moderate Extremist even Revolutionary—were of English educated middle class or landlord extraction Yet as we shall see later Phadke's path was different from not only Gokhale's but Tilak's also and even Savarkar brothers He was a revolutionary but with a difference

In his childhood Phadke used to listen to his father reading out newspaper reports of the Mutiny and marvel at the heroism of Nanasaheb the Rani of Jhansi Tantia Tope and others Later in 1870 when the wellknown Sarvajanik Sabha was established at Pune under Mahadeo Govind Ranade's guidance and as a result of Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi's (wellknown universally as Sarvajanik Kaka) untiring efforts with the aim of social and political reforms Phadke came under its influence took the vow of Swadeshi and established and ran for a time a National School for children But all this was very far indeed from the dangerous path he decided to tread only a few years hence Phadke's biographer V S Joshi mentions in his book an incident in this connection Phadke had applied for leave to visit his dying mother The application however did not receive prompt attention of the officer concerned and was ultimately turned down When Phadke reached home in spite of this he found his mother dead The experience must have been shattering and it was natural for him never to forgive the authorities for their callousness But even this cannot, I think explain the choice of his future course of activities

The turning point it seems was his sudden decision to go round and see with his own eyes the plight of peasants in the

villages devastated by the Deccan famine of 1876-77 as also the government measures to combat the disaster. For this he took long leave from his office and started touring the villages mostly on foot. He included cities like Indore, Ujjain, Nagpur and Baroda in his itinerary and travelled through Khandesh up to Nasik, Sangli, Miraj and Kolhapur. It was a melancholy journey through the country ravaged by famine with deserted villages and temples and long tracts of desolate land.

One thing however has to be noted here. His object here was not relief work as might have been expected of a person with 'Sarvajanik Sabha' background. His aim was to cover on foot, as many afflicted villages and talk to as many people as possible to study their mood. They came to him with their harrowing tales of starvation and death. As an individual he found himself absolutely helpless to be of much use to them though he gave away all that he had with him. As for Government measures to combat famine he not only pointed out their utter inadequacy but also observed in his unfinished autobiography:

> Here cultivation is done by canal water and had the government freely supplied this water and food to our men for two months the harvest would have been prosperous and lasted the people for one year there would have been no necessity of importing grains and my countrymen would not have died of starvation.

The experience proved traumatic. For what he saw, heard and felt turned him away for good from the path of social reform on to the dangerous one of agrarian revolution. As he wrote in his unfinished autobiography:

> "The inhabitants of India are reduced to death by starvation under the British rule. They (that is the Government—C.S.) opened famine works. But a grant of only one and a half anna a day was made when grain was selling at five seers per rupee. These dying people are children born of the same motherland of which I was born. Thinking day and night of this and thousand other miseries my mind had been wholly bent upon the downfall of the British power in India. I thought of nothing else. While bathing, while going through ablutions at dinner

and in bed—and I had no sleep for hours together at times because of these thoughts—the idea haunted my mind I used to rise up at the dead of night and ponder over the destruction of the British rule until I went almost mad with the idea! [2]

With his mind thus made up, Phadke set out on his hazardous revolutionary mission And herein lies his distinctive contribution to our revolutionary movement. Unlike the Chapekar brothers in 1897 or the Savarkar brothers in 1910 of his Maharashtra or our Prifulla Chaki or Khudiram in 1908 he did not go in for setting up a secret group with educated young men from his own class for planning individual assassination of Government officials or their agents Instead Phadke moved untiringly among the sturdy people belonging to the Ramoshi tribe contacted the Bhils, the Kolis and the Dhangars of Khandesh and Nasik districts and later even the redoubtable Rohillas of Hyderabad and secretly recruited their youths into his ranks Himself a Chitpavan Brahmin of a deeply religious temperament he thus cut across all class caste and communal barriers At midnight on February 20 1879 he addressed an assembly of over 200 such young Adivasi recruits and launched his operations He had of course, with him a few friends belonging to his own class and caste also They were all armed with swords, spears, lathis and a few fire-arms belonging to their leader It was at this meeting that Phadke selected the valiant Ramoshi leader, Sirdar Daulatrao Naik as his second in command to deputise for him in his absence

Phadke's distinctiveness as a revolutionary is also evident in the choice of his method of operation We know from his own words that his target of attack was the British Raj However as he had chosen the Adivasi and Kisan youths as his comrades in arms he launched his attacks at the opening stage against the *Saukar* or village moneylenders who were their direct and immediate oppressors He therefore started his armed campaign with lightening raids against the *Saukars*—Marathi Marwari and Gujrati—and collected by force their money ornaments and arms particularly fire arms And—this is significant—the armed bands under his direction piled up at the very centre of the

village, all records, documents and debt-deeds and set fire to them amidst tumultuous exultation of the oppressed Kisans and Adivasis of the whole area Thus he consolidated his position among the rural poor, particularly the Adivasis, and became a legend in his lifetime He was also able to win the sympathy of many village headmen or Patels who helped him in different ways

The agrarian character of Phadke's armed struggle particularly during its first phase reminds us of the peasant uprisings of 1875 which the British rulers defamed as 'Deccan Riots' However, the Deccan Riots Commission set up by the Government to enquire into the causes of these 'riots' admits

> ' as a rule the disturbances were marked by the absence of serious crime The object of the rioters was in every case to obtain and destroy the bonds decrees etc , in the possession of their creditors when these were peaceably given up to the assembled mob there was usually nothing further done When the moneylender refused, violence was used to frighten him into a surrender or to get possession of the papers

Again,

> 'In reviewing the character of the disturbances generally the most remarkable feature present is the small amount of serious crime It was not much of a rebellion against the oppressor as an attempt to accomplish a very definite and practical object, namely disarming the enemy by taking away his weapons (bonds and accounts) and for this purpose mere demonstration of force was usually sufficient'

The same objective of 'disarming the enemy by taking away his weapons' inspired Phadke's struggle during its first phase Similar also were his efforts to avoid violence as far as possible There were indeed very few casualties—the reason why Phadke could not be hanged The following episode of what happened during a raid also shows the strict code of conduct and discipline which he enforced on his followers

> a Wani woman bundled up her jewellery in her *sari* and offered a violent resistance to the Ramoshis when

they tried to forcibly remove the jewellery from her Attracted by her cries, Vasudeo Balvant rushed forth to the scene and flew into a rage when he saw the Ramoshis engaged in a scuffle with a woman for he had issued strict orders to his men that during the raids women must not be molested and children must not be hurt! He therefore admonished the Ramoshis and assured the woman complete safety "

Even where peasant fury led to bloodshed in such agrarian struggle, an idea of what enormity of exploitation and oppression drove them to such desperation may be had from the following two instances cited by a high Government official Sir G Wingate as quoted in the Deccan Riots Commission Report

" I refer to two instances of murders of village moneylenders committed in widely separate parts of our Presidency One of these occurred in the Sholapur Collectorate, where a creditor was murdered by some of his debtors, whom his oppressions had exasperated beyond the limits of endurance, in the midst of his village in broad day among a crowd of his neighbours who apparently viewed the deed with approbation and at all events did nothing to prevent The other in Gujrat where a creditor was murdered on the high road in open day by hired assassins at the instance of debtors whose sufferings at his hands will be best understood from the following remarks made by the Sadar Fouzdari Adalat in passing sentence 'These prisoners of whom two are heads of adjoining villages have been convicted for executing a plan for the destruction of a person who was their common creditor and an object of general jealousy and hatred is one for whose forbearance in pecuniary claims no smaller price was acceptable than the dishonour at his hands of the wives and sisters of the poor peasants who were indebted to him'

' What must be the state of things which can compel cultivators proverbially patient and long suffering accustomed to more or less of ill usage and injustice all times to redress their wrongs by murder and in defiance of an ignominious death to themselves?

V S Joshi deals with the impact of the 1876 77 famine on Phadke but hardly mentions the so called Deccan Riots which broke out in 1875 as a possible source of inspiration However while pointing out the reasons why it was possible for Phadke to recruit the Ramoshi tribals rather readily into his armed band he writes at one place

> They (that is the Ramoshis—C S) were detained and tortured by the police during the troubled days of the Deccan Riots These privations and persecutions had transformed these men into a violent anti Government bloc [4]

It seems the similarity between the Deccan Riots and the first phase of Phadke s uprising of 1879 was not fortuitous The latter was in fact deeply rooted in the tradition of militant peasant struggles of the immediate past

But the difference in nature between the two struggles has also to be noted While the so called Deccan Riots of 1875 were spontaneous and scattered uprisings against the unbearable exploitation of the *Sawkars* Phadke s raids were from the beginning better planned organised and led and above all had a definite political objective particularly during its later phase—namely the overthrow of the British Raj Thus we can appreciate how carefully he prepared for the coming struggle from the following lines of his biographer

> Vasudeo Balvant had detailed sketches and maps of the region showing the hills and hillocks cities and villages forts and lakes rivers caves and routes in the districts Being in the Military Finance Office Vasudeo Balvant could contact high placed military officers and through them arrange for the visits of some of his colleagues to places like the Sappers and Miners Regimental Head quarters always keeping the officers dark about his real purpose in these visits which was to see the military establishments as much as possible

That Phadke could do all this on such a scale during almost the whole of the first phase of his struggle without any information as to the identity of the leader leaking out and his name remained all the time in Government Service rolls speaks for his excellence as an organiser of revolutionary activities

Though during this first phase Phadke's attack was against the *Sawkars* and *Banias* it was also a challenge to the authority of the Government Sir Richard Temple Governor of Bombay, later wrote

> peasants of humble caste but of hardihood and courage were actuated by the hope of gain to times when employment and labour had proved scanty Still the readiness with which they answered the mandate of their shadowy and half mysterious chief like bees hiving, the apathetic and unsatisfactory behaviour of the people in many villages and the sympathy known to be felt, if not openly evinced by many of the upper classes were grave circumstances demanding reflection on our part [6]

The first phase was over when towards the first week of May Phadke issued under his signature a proclamation from his hide out warning the Government that unless extensive famine works are opened throughout the length and breadth of this province for the common *ryots* who are without employment burden of government taxes is reduced the operations till then confined to rich Indians would extend to Europeans And with the treasure so collected we would assemble a large number of followers and stir up another mutiny Copies of the proclamation were posted to the Governor the Collectors and other Government officials

With this declaration the political nature of the struggle came to the fore and its second phase opened On May 4 the Government despatched two companies of the 4th Rifles under Col *Crispin and two European officers and 300 men of the 11th* Native Infantry under Major Fulton to suppress Phadke's legion and set a price of Rs 4000/- on his head V S Joshi writes that setting a price for the capture of an underground revolutionary, though repeated many times later years was tried for the first time in Phadke's case [8]

What military tactics did Phadke take recourse to against the superior enemy forces? The expression guerilla warfare' is sometimes used rather freely these days I am not sure whether Phadke's tactics could be thus classified in strict military parlance But an idea of how he operated may be gathered from

the following panicky telegram sent by the Governor of Bombay to the Secretary of State for India

> 'Your Lordship's telegram regarding the Deccan troubles Recent dacoities occurred either side above and below mountains, western borders, Poona and Satara districts Dacoits are hillmen hardy, daring characters, led by educated persons Number not exceeding three hundred Steep hills and thick jungles favour their operations Detachments of troops despatched and special pursuing parties under European officers Leader not caught but systematically pursued' [9]

Secondly, the way Phadke talked to the Adivasi Kisans in simple, racy language and imageries, also goes to show the very close relationship he wanted to establish between his armed bands and the villagers which is so essential for the success of this type of struggle Here, for instance, is an excerpt from a speech he made at a meeting of Dhangars of Khandesh (translated from original Marathi by Government translator)

> ' We on being born small children cannot lift a "Kuja" holding two maunds of water, but a man of 25 years can lift it If you wish that a child of 25 years should be born—can it be? So our state at present is just like this We are small and in the same way as parents take care of their children when cough, fever and sickness come, if you take care of us, the English having been destroyed by our hands, you will have comfort, but if you will not rear and take care of us as you are now suffering by the English so they will even dig up your children '[10]

Some idea of the area Phadke covered during his five months' struggle (from February 20 to July 20, 1879) may be had from the names of some places (mostly villages, jungles or hills) he visited in this period and as mentioned in his Diary

> Loni Pune Chinshoose, Dhamari Dhavdi, Kunda Loni Panmulla Ramdara, Devadari Sonuree Savleshwar, Kande Pathar Poorunpoli Wahale Pangara, Bhatmala, Polhar Waghdar, Wadi, Mangdari Ooghly Surpalla,

Kondanpur, Khudul wasla Singhud, Ramkada Dhangarwada, Ghuru Poudkhar, Likai, Devi Janegaum Poosana, Pune, Sholapur, Oorulee, Ganapoor, Shahabad, Kandupoor, Deoorchoopoo Garulee, Koorvchalie Kurkunda, Lampoorn Koorangadi, Nargadi, Gandurul Jamnad, Anantapur Kandherey. Nalapaiya, Pudandari, Dharmar, Booreely Julapur, Hatkiapur, Oodlee, Khachad, Kurjoor, Gardumla, Nadigotcuru, Mandal Joopad, Joothur, Lingar, Chamera, Doodhya Atmakuru Noopad, Lingala, Chhalivila, Doodhal Yenkala Kothru, Bulwari, Krishnapur, Thanukpur, Negloti Pecheru, Bhimgola Pusdali, Mandipal Koloor, Moodmal, Godeybaloor, Indapur, Magoor Mangtal, Banatpur, Nath [11]

The outcome of such an unequal struggle was of course, inevitable in the context of that period On May 18, 1879 the valiant Ramoshi leader and the closest comrade of Phadke was killed in battle after putting up a stiff resistance In June Hari Naik, one of the bravest peasant leaders was sentenced to death and on the 20th of July Phadke himself was surprised by an armed detachment under Major Demell in a Buddhist Vihara in Bijapur district six miles from the Nizam's territory He had taken refuge there on the same day after a 30 mile trek, wounded and running a high temperature Yet he tried to resist but was overpowered and again wounded in the scuffle

That Phadke's struggle at the early stage of our national movement was foredoomed to failure was realised by some of the perceptive contemporaries I P Minayev, the wellknown Russian Indologist who was then travelling in Maharashtra for example, wrote

> Phadke had pure lofty intentions but his failure was not difficult to foresee' [12]

Phadke's trial was the first sedition case in India Sir Richard Temple was very keen on securing capital punishment for Phadke On his instruction Nugents, Acting Secretary to Government Judicial Department asked the Legal Remembrancer to report ' whether in the event of his being tried for an offence against the State there is sufficient evidence to ensure conviction, and whether it is probable that a capital punishment will be

pressed if a conviction is secured J R Naylor the Legal Remembrancer however disappointed the Governor by giving his opinion that although there was full intention on the part of Vasudeo to wage war against the Queen no actual offence punishable with death under Section 121 of I P C had been committed He was therefore tried and convicted under Section 121A 122 124A 395 and 400 of the I P C and sentenced on November 7 1879 to transportation for life It is said that when after the pronouncement of the sentence he was coming out of the Court a vast admiring crowd shouted 'Vasudeo Balvant Phadke ki jai' V S Joshi informs us that this was the first time that such a cry was heard in India The sentence was later upheld by the Bombay High Court on appeal

Although we usually associate the sentence of transportation for life with the Andamans Phadke however was not sent there At that time there was no Cellular Jail in the Andamans and there were only makeshift arrangements for keeping a fairly large number of prisoners connected with 1857 and Wahabi uprisings The rules there allowed the long term prisoners after a period to be released on the Island So the authorities thought that if that happened in Phadke's case he might, with his great talent for organization stir up fresh troubles there At a special meeting therefore Sir Richard and the members of his Executive Council decided on December 22 1879 to ship him to the fort of Aden instead which was much more secure the number of prisoners there was small and it was directly under the jurisdiction of the Bombay Government

Even from Aden jail Phadke made a daring escape on October 12 1880 But where could he go? He knew neither the terrain nor the local language and so was recaptured on the same day He was brought back to the jail to be confined in a solitary cell with heavier fetters rivetted around his ankles

Thus Phadke spent the next two years and was made to perform for long hours hard and exacting labour His iron constitution which had defied the extreme rigours of an underground fighter's life was now ravaged by overwork and later tuberculosis Moreover he went on hunger strike repeatedly and for long periods demanding the removal of his fetters and some improvement in his living condition His health was shattered

and finding their enemy well on his way to death the Government at last ordered that special, somewhat lighter fetters be made for him.' Vasudeo Balvant Phadke died far away from his beloved motherland on February 17, 1883. In his unfinished autobiography he had, thus, outlined his dream:

> 'I would have sent my men in different parts of the country to raise a rebellion months in advance. Such simultaneous outbreaks in all parts of India, would have created quite a panic in the European community. Daks thus would have been stopped. Railway lines and telegraph wires would have been cut and broken down. All communications would have been stopped and news would not have travelled from one part of the country to another. There would have been an opportunity to break upon the jails. Nothing would have been known as to the strength of our forces and when and where we were. It would have even been a peculiar phenomenon and our object of establishing an Indian Republic by driving the British out of India, would have been entirely fulfilled. Forgive me my countrymen my failure.

For historic and obvious reasons, it was, of course, not possible for Phadke to realise his dream. One cannot, however, fail to notice that he was the first Indian revolutionary to set up as our goal the establishment of a fully *independent Indian Republic*. This concept of goal may be compared to the ideas of some Maharashtrian and Bengali revolutionaries of later days. Thus, Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee, one of the topmost leaders of the revolutionary 'Yugantar' party writes in his memoirs that round about 1912 when Sayaji Rao the Gaekwar of Baroda was in Calcutta, Satyen Sen, a well-known revolutionary, met him and said 'You shall be our Victor Emmanuel II' to which the Gaekwar was said to have retorted 'But where is your Garibaldi?'[214]

The suppression of the so-called 'Deccan Riots' in 1875 and of Phadke's uprising in 1879 was coupled with some measures for immediate economic relief to the distressed peasantry of Maharashtra. As a distinguished Soviet scholar points out:

'In 1875, a special commission was appointed to investi-

gate the situation in Ahmednagar and Poona Districts (where particularly the Riots had broken out—CS), but the drafting of remedial legislation dragged on for nearly four years, and there can be no doubt that only the new and substantial rise in the Maratha peasantry's debt to the money-lenders during the famine of 1876-77 and their stepped up struggle against the colonial rule, the feudal landlords and usurers, which reached its high point with the heroic action of Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, hastened the appearance in 1879 of the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act* This law the operation of which was originally confined to the districts of Ahmednagar and Poona, was extended in 1905 to the greater part of Bombay Province, with somewhat extended control by the courts over the relations between money-lenders and their debtors, it provided for conciliation and other like measures and made more difficult the procedure for the transfer of mortgaged land to money-lenders The said law, however neither checked the rise of the peasants' indebtedness to money-lenders nor the passing of the land into *their hands*' [1]

This is as far as Government measures went Hostile comments against the rebel patriot were made by *Times of India* and *Bombay Gazette* and the Anglo Indian press generally The nationalist press of Bombay however almost without exception praised his patriotism but naturally in rather cautious terms In *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, Sisir Kumar Ghose thus commented editorially

'Vasudeo Balvant Phadke possesses many of the traits of *those high-souled men who are now and then sent in this* world for the accomplishment of great purposes He was an angel tempted by the devil and seduced His heart was sound, but his reason led him astray Yet the noble feelings of a Washington, a Tell and a Garibaldi animated his breast Forget for a moment that Phadke led bands of dacoits and sought the subversion of British Government and then he stands before you as a being who is as

superior to the common herd of humanity as the Himalayas to the Satpoora Range'[16]

All nationalist leaders—Moderate and Extremist—from Ranade to Tilak—also tried to combine genuine admiration with caution in dignified terms V S Joshi writes that Tilak used to keep a copy of Phadke's photograph (which used to be sold in thousands in Maharashtra those days) between those of Nana Sahab and Rashbehari Bose[17]

Minayev made an interesting entry in his *Diaries* (February 5, 1880) on the interview he had with M Namjoshi at one time a very close associate of Tilak Minayev wrote that Namjoshi was a friend of Phadke also 'He expressed strong though not active, disaffection towards the British Government' Minayev also enumerated three questions which agitated Namjoshi—condition of the toiling masses under British rule, state of Indian economy in general and the widespread disaffection against the Government[18]

The comment on the points made by Namjoshi during this interview with Minayev by the Soviet scholar Goldberg is interesting

> ' we easily detect a striking resemblance between the views of these two (that is Namjoshi and Phadke—C S) representatives of Maratha democratic intelligentsia At the same time however, we also find here quite a vital divergence Namjoshi who is sincerely concerned over the sad plight of the peasants puts the whole blame on the British authorities Phadke on the other hand as we have seen, defends the oppressed peasantry not only against the Government but also against the moneylenders and landlords Phadke's attitude to the peasant question tinted with Narodnik colours, need a detailed examination '[19]

Goldberg tries later on, to go into the question of Phadke's difference from as also similarity with the Narodniks

> ' True, in the conditions of his time Phadke could not rise to the Russian Narodnik's level of social consciousness We have no ground to suppose that he dreamt of a socialist order of society and thought how it could be established in

> India skipping capitalism Nor did he believe in any special *communal* order of Indian life His affinity to Narodism lay in something else namely in that he an Indian republican in fact sought to deliver the *Maharashtra* peasants from the money-lenders and landlords and to him the idea of national liberation was related to the idea of a peasant uprising [20]

After the bloody suppression of the National Revolt in 1857 and advent of the Raj agrarian unrest had become chronic al most all over India The Indigo revolt in Bengal Kuka rebel lion in the Punjab repeated Moplah and Rampa uprisings in Mala bar and Andhra widespread Wahabi conspiracies from Patna to *Sitana beyond the N W F P the Pabna Riots to name only a* few at random were succeeded in the late seventies by the so called Deccan Riots in 1875 culminating in the 1879 revolu tionary struggle directly against the Raj of Adivasis and Kisans led by a much more conscious revolutionary Phadke All this particularly the last had an impact on our national scene which may seem strange but not really unexpected Sir William Wed derburn (twice President of the Indian National Congress) men tions a memorandum in his biography of Allan Octavian Hume the founding father of the Congress which was actually Hume s own memorandum found among his papers The following ex tract from it published in Wedderburn s biography of Hume reads as follows

> I was shown seven large volumes (corresponding to a *certain mode of dividing the country*) *containing* a vast number of entries English abstracts or translations—longer or shorter—of vernacular reports or communications of one kind or another all arranged according to districts sub districts sub divisions and the cities towns and villages in cluded in these The number of these entries was enor mous there were said at the time to be communications from over thirty thousand different reporters Many of the entries reported conversations between men of the lowest classes all going to show that these poor men were pervaded with a sense of the hopelessness of the existing state of affairs that they were convinced that they would starve and

die, and they wanted to do *something* They were going to do something and stand by each other, *and that something* meant violence In the existing state of the lowest half-starving classes it was considered that the first few crimes would be the signal for hundreds of similar ones and for a general development of lawlessness paralysing the authorities and the respectable classes It was considered also that everywhere the small bands would begin to coalesce into large ones like drops of water on a leaf that all the bad characters in the country would join, and that very soon after the bands obtained formidable proportions, a certain small number of the educated classes, at the time desperately, perhaps unreasonably bitter against the Government would join the movement assume here and there the lead give the outbreak cohesion and direct it is a national revolt [21]

There is of course no direct reference to Phadke's uprising in Hume's Memorandum Yet that the linking up of the reports mentioned in it with the agrarian troubles in Maharashtra culminating in Phadke's uprising is not just an idle conjecture is proved by the following passage from Sir William Wedderburn's own writing

It began with sporadic gang robberies and attacks on money lenders until the bands of dacoits combining together, became too strong for the police and the whole military force at Poona horse, foot and artillery had to take the field against them Roaming through jungle tracks of Western Ghats these bands dispersed in the presence of military force only to reunite immediately at some convenient point A leader from the more instructed class was found Calling himself Sivaji the Second, who addressed challenges to the Government, he offered a reward of Rs 500/- for the head of Sir Richard Temple (Governor of Bombay) and claimed to lead a national revolt upon the lines on which the Maharashtra power had originally been founded' [22]

Whether Phadke called himself Sivaji the Second or not the reference here to him is unmistakable and the description here of the operation of Phadke's legion does remind us of the exploits

of Sivaji's famous Mowali bands But here we are concerned with something else Wedderburn in his biography of Hume writes

> 'Towards the close of Lord Lytton's Viceroyalty, that is about 1878 and 1879 (that is, the time of Phadke's uprising—C S), Mr Hume became convinced that some definite action was called for to counteract the growing unrest' [23]

Hence his historic confabulations with the new Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, and their co-sponsorship of the Indian National Congress in 1885, Hume's conception of the role of the Congress being in his own words

> 'A safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces, *generated by our own action, was urgently needed and no* more efficacious safety-valve than our Congress movement could possibly be devised [24]

Whether or to what extent later developments of the Congress fulfilled the dream of its founding father, is however, a different question which falls beyond our scope here But that Hume was steadfast in his advocacy of the 'safety valve' theory is evident from the following extract from his 'Private and Confidential' letter addressed to 'Every Member of the Congress Party' dated February 16, 1892 from 6 Park Street, Calcutta

> 'You do not, especially the rich and well to do, realise that the existing system of administration is not only ill-adapted to the wants of the country, is not only pauperizing the people but is inevitably preparing the way for one of the most terrible cataclysms in the history of the world The people are very patient, very mild and humble but so were the people of France only twenty years nay only ten years before they rose and murdered their Sovereign and practically the bulk of the better classes It was Hunger and Misery, those great leaders and Teachers that changed at last, apparently in a day , that crowd of sheep into an army of wolves
>
> 'Do not fancy that the Government will be able to protect you or itself No earthly power can stem an universal agra-

man rising in a country like this There will be no foe to meet in the field, but rail and road will become impossible, bridges will be wrecked, telegraphs cease to exist, supplies be arrested, thousands of rioters may be killed but to what avail as for leaders when the hour comes the man—be sure there will be no lack of leaders' [2]

This may be compared with Wedderburn's words quoted in this paper and particularly with Phadke's own words in his autobiography outlining his dream It seems Hume and Wedderburn did appreciate the real significance of Phadke in our freedom movement

Lastly, another foreigner almost at the same time was also watching the developments in India no less keenly He wrote

> In India serious complications, if not a general outbreak, is in store for British government What the English take from them annually in the form of rent, dividends for railways useless to the Hindus pension for military and civil servicemen for Afghanistan and other wars etc etc —what they take from them *without any equivalent* and *quite apart* from what they appropriate to themselves annually *within* India,—speaking only of the *value of the commodities* the Indians have gratuitously and annually to *send over* to England—it amounts to *more than the total sum of income of the 60 millions of agricultural and industrial labourers of India!* This is a bleeding process with a vengeance! The famine years are pressing each other and *in dimensions* till now not yet suspected in Europe! There is an actual conspiracy going on wherein Hindus and Mussulmans co-operate, the British Government is aware that something is "brewing', but this shallow people (I mean the governmental men), stultified by their own parliamentary ways of talking and thinking do not even desire to see clear to realize the whole extent of the imminent danger! To delude others and by deluding them to delude yourself—this is *parliamentary wisdom* in a nutshell *Tant mieux!* [2]

[2] So much the better

These lines were written by Karl Marx from London on February 19 1881 to N F Danielson, a Russian economist, ideologist of liberal Narodism and the first translator of Volume I of Marx's Capital into Russian The quotation is from On Colonialism —Marx and Engels Foreign Languages Publishing House Moscow, p 304

The Parliamentary wisdom of the British Government which goads Hume to plead urgently for immediate installation of a safety valve makes Marx exclaim happily *Tant mieux !*

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BAGHA JATIN

PRITHWINDRA MUKHERJEE

In the social and economic changes brought about by industrialisation three major thought leaders in Europe concentrated their efforts to protect man against all exploitation by man by upholding the value and importance of human *labour* in the development of a new society Saint Simon (1760 1825) Auguste Comte (1798 1857) and Karl Marx (1818 83) Fully abreast with contemporary Western thought Bankimchandra Chatterjee 1838 94) revealed to the nascent Indian nation the new religion of *anushilan* (self-culture) based on the value of human *action* (*Karma yoga*) according to the teachings of Sri Krishna—the Divine Man—in the *Gita* Taking the cue from this great interpretation –call it a parallel inspiration for the sake of objectivity— Lokamanya Tilak (1856 1920) Swami Vivekananda (1863 1902) and Sri Aurobindo (1872 1950) held up each in his unique and convincing vision this activist theory so typically Indian before the patriots striving to create a new Indian society

Fed with the writings of Bankim Jatindranath Mukherjee (popularly known as Bagha Jatin) as a college student was more than impressed by his personal contacts with Vivekananda which began with the latter's mission to relieve Calcutta of an epidemic of plague in 1897 98 Vivekananda's influence on Jatin can pertinently be traced in the writings of two of his young followers M N Roy (1887 1954) and Dr Jadugopal Mukherjee (1886 1976) Like all modern educated young men of his time recalled Roy *of Jatin he tended to accept the reformed religion preached by* Swami Vivekananda—a God who would stand the test of reason and a religion which served progressive social and human purpose He believed himself to be a Karmayogi and recommended the ideal to all of us Detached from the unnecessary mystic preoccupation Karmayogi means a humanist He who believes that self realisation can be attained through human action must logically also believe in man's creativeness that man is the maker

of his destiny That is also the essence of Humanism Jatindra was a Humanist—perhaps the first in modern India Insisting on this aspect of the Karmayogi in Jatin Jadugopal recalls We have known him as the embodiment of the *Gita* His very life was cast in the *Gita* Happiness or woe living or dying gaining or losing victory or defeat praise or reproach were all equal in his eyes [2] He was so strong in his physical mental and spiritual force and he soared on such a lofty consciousness that I have not yet come across anybody to compare him with continues Jadugopal Perhaps man can never be perfect but among those who have gone the closest to perfection Jatindranath's place is certain In his character my scrutinising eyes failed to find any blemish [3]

This force often hidden behind Jatin's utter devotion to God and to the creatures of this world added to his spontaneous humility a genuine fascination Endowed with a tremendous will his labour could never be contented to a personal self elevation Here the influence of his own mother Sharatshashi Devi was decisive on him Devouring with gusto and practising ardently the lessons of self culture conveyed by the contemporary masters—Bhudev Mukherjee (1827 94) Rajnarayan Basu (1826 99) Bankim and Yogendra Vidyabhushan (1845 1904)—she led a dedicated life of altruistic social service A gifted poet she demonstrated with her own life the truth of Vivekananda's reminder 'Every created being (*jiva*) is but a spark of the Creator (*Shiva*) she succumbed to the contagion while nursing a cholera patient

Early in his life Jatin drew around him dare devil boys capable of boisterous pastimes like football self defence swimming and riding With his chums he went voluntarily for succouring villagers on their sick bed and cremating the dead of the untouchables He sought in the *Gita* the secret of making oneself a human being Fond of enacting patriotic and mythological plays he often took the role of Hanuman or Prahlad At times he invited his elderly friend Surendranath Tagore (1872 1940) to conduct classes on art history and economics Jatin's striving to rid his countrymen of their misery and humiliation began thus in the form of social service animated by a trust in the supreme God (*Shiva*) A number of his childhood friends and followers—like Kunjalal Sahu Ray Bhavabhushan Mitra Suresh Majumdar Shrish Das—par

ticipated in his political programme when, in 1903, he met Sri Aurobindo to be recognised as the latter's "righthand man"[4] in organising a vast net-work of underground fighters for India's absolute autonomy from the British rule

Famous as an efficient social antidote to the arrogant behaviour of the British officers towards the Indians, Jatin was none the less admired by his British employers who, however, remained ignorant till 1910—of his commitment to the revolutionary action For instance when, in 1908, on his way to Darjeeling on an official mission, Jatin had to deal single handed with Capt Murphy and three other cheeky army dignitaries, and was to receive a wide coverage in the Anglo Indian press for his heroic deed, it made the Secretary of State's "blood boil" as usual[5] But Henry Wheeler of the Bengal Secretariat screened Jatin as a high-souled man and dismissed the case against him under the evident argument that such publicity could but harm the British interests in the country[6] Asked by the Magistrate to "behave properly in the future" Jatin expressed his impossibility to "give assurance that he would refrain in future from taking similar action in self-defence or in the vindication of the rights of his countrymen"[7] This very Wheeler would not hesitate to describe Jatin, later, in his letter to Lord Hardinge, as the most dangerous and desperate enemy of the British Raj

Desirous to comfort the vicinity of Koya (Kushtea) his native village, of the sporadic damages done by a stray Royal Bengal tiger Jatin, though a seasoned shooter, had to kill the animal after about a 30 minute man-to beast wrestling bout with a small dagger Along with an immediate national ovation, Jatin received on behalf of the Government a silver trophy depicting his courageous exploit Later in 1916 as a tribute to Jatin, Dr Suresh Sarvadhikary organised the "Bengal Regiment sent to the Mesopotamian battlefield"

Born in an upper class Brahmin family—one of his uncles was a pleader and professor of law another advocate, at the Calcutta High Court a third physician practising in Calcutta his deceased father an erudite man acutely aware of the demands of a changing society—Jatin's acquaintance with Vivekananda ("Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant the poor, the illite-

rate, the cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers') and his reading of Bankim on the futility of the system of castes, led him to operate a slow revolution in the social structure. For the annual festivities in Autumn, as many as a thousand guests came every day for lunch at his uncle's home, for four days at a stretch, when an average of 400 kg of rice a day was cooked for them under Jatin's initiative.[9] A special refined rice used to be reserved for the upper class guests but one day a farm labourer demanded to be served this rice. Following this the distinction in rice was abolished and the same fine rice was prepared for everybody.[10] Further in October 1905, indifferent to the indignation of the orthodox society Jatin seated guests of all social origins together in taking a common oath of filial loyalty to India the Mother. By that time, anecdotes like his carrying an aged Muslim woman to her home, partaking of her meagre bowl of rice and calling her 'mother'[11], had sufficiently disturbed the peace of the orthodox. But a nation wide current of social and religious transformation prevented them from grumbling aloud. Rumours coming from Barisal warned them about a possible peasant uprising Hindus and Muslims together under the influence of Mahatma Aswinikumar Datta.[12]

Believing in a decentralised federation of innumerable autonomous revolutionary units each headed by a regional leader whose followers were not to know the whereabouts of the other units Jatin with Sri Aurobindo's approval[13] had stayed away from the activities of the Manicktola Garden highly centralised under Barin Ghose. He was nevertheless present in all the summit meetings of the Extremist leaders.[14] One of the founding brains behind the *Chatra-Bhandar*[15]—transformed later into *Shramajivi Samabaya*—to house clothe and feed the patriotic volunteers of the various units and to meet the financial needs of the movement with business transactions Jatin's was a pioneering effort in obtaining collaboration of eminent land-holders (*zamindars*) and businessmen rendered sympathetic to the widening of the nationalist action from the apex of middle class (*bhadralok*) to a democratic basis. Another such organisation was according to the confession made by Sailen Das (an approver in the Howrah Case in 1910) the Hindusthan Cooperative Life Insurance Co. Similarly the *Bharat-Bhandar* run by Atin Basu—one of the earliest to have received formal initiation into the revolutionary party from Jatin[16]

Thanks to the constant collaboration of zealous patriots like Annada Kaviraj Munsif Avinash Chakravarti Deviprasad Ray Satish Sarkar Mohinimohan Chakravarti (of the Mohini Mills) Hemendrakishore Acharya Chaudhuri Shrish Das (zamindar of Samrail Faridpur) Jatin Ray (zamindar of Nurnagar Sundarbans) and with the participation of Suren Tagore (Silaidah) and Raja Brajendrakishore (Gauripur Mymensingh) the movement gained momentum under Jatin's untiring guidance. The popularity of this action can be proved from official reports such as the proceedings of the Howrah Case for instance most of the members of the Howrah Shibpur unit hailed from the Chaudhuripara area occupying various posts at the Bengal Secretariat and as such indoctrinated by Jatin himself. A number of these recruits took to work among Government employees students mental workers farmers peasants and soldiers. When in 1908 the first wave of repression sought to paralyse the whole movement with massive arrests at the Maniktola Garden Jatin and his followers had an immediate solution for canalising the frustrated energy of the young men on the advice of Justice Saradacharan Mitra (Calcutta High Court) the Bengal Youngmen's Zamindari Cooperative Society was registered in order to place revolutionary young men in the rural agricultural sector and make them work on a cooperative line in Gosaba (Sundarbans). Others went to the polytechnical school in Sodepur founded a decade ago by Shashibhushan Ray Chaudhuri—one of Jatin's senior friends—to spread alphabetisation and competence in cottage and small scale industries among the rural population through night classes. Psychologically in tune with the hopes of Acharya P. C. Ray (whose personal contacts with Jatin had been revealed by documents produced during the Alipore Bomb Case) this was a significant victory to turn the attention of the alienated English educated *bhadralok* to the need of the masses and to accept all labour with due dignity.

Another social achievement of the Extremists under Jatin's leadership was the relief mission organised in 1913 during the devastating Damodar flood. Of course under cover of this irrefutable humanitarian endeavour—appreciated even by the Government—the revolutionaries had all their leisure to hold clandestine meetings with Jatin with a view to consolidating their support for a general armed rising as soon as the World War was declared.

Thanks to emissaries active abroad since 1906 Jatin had the earliest certitude of the oncoming War[1]

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An honest champion of the guerrilla warfare (as the culmination of a real revolutionary preparation of the people) Jatin had sensed that without a national army, India would never be able to defend her own interest While an apprentice under Barrister Pringley Kennedy of Muzaffarpore, towards the tail end of the 19th century, Jatin had discovered that Kennedy had been pleading from the Congress platform (1888 91) for a *National Army* of India's own Editor of the *Trihoot Courrier* and a good historian Kennedy had been a Premchand Raychand scholar of the University of Calcutta Jatin's conviction found at last a concrete support in Sri Aurobindo's experience of having met in Central India a few army officers ready to work with the Revolutionary Council Keeping in view "a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt' Sri Aurobindo did not at all exclude the utility of "a general revolt in the Indian army"[2]

In 1906, for the second time Jatin's friend Hiralal Ray (member of the Calcutta Anushilan Party and teacher at Magura) organised a festival to commemorate the Hindu king and hero Sitaram Ray at the latter's capital, Muhammadpur in Jessore Among those convened there by Jatin for a secret meeting, we come across the names of Taraknath Das, Adhar Laskar, Shrish Sen and Satyen Sen each of them consecutively right since 1906 went abroad as emissaries for working in Europe and in the USA Earnest about Jatin's scheme of introducing a systematic military training in India (training which was especially denied to the Bengalis) Tarak entered in 1908 the Norwich University in Vermont "a high-class engineering and military establishment, in order to receive military training He also applied for enlistment as a student of the institution, in the Vermont National Guard but this was not permitted by the US authorities It was noticed in the College that he was bitterly hostile to England and voiced his hostility on all occasions "[3] He had in the meantime been singled out as the editor of the *Free Hindusthan*, published from New York, "an imitation of the *Indian Sociologist*" (of Shyamaji Krishnavarma) Joined up by Adhar Laskar, G D Kumar (of the Calcutta National College) and Panduranga Khankhoje (Tilak's

emissary), Tarak began moulding the settlers from India on the Pacific coast into a patriotic organisation which was to become seven years later under Har Dayal (who did much to minimise Tarak's role therein) the *Ghadr* Party Both Adhar and Pandu ranga too, along with their higher studies in agriculture, went to the Mount Tamalpais Military Academy No research worker can remain indifferent to Tarak's sincere exemplary and constant solicitude for India's cause abroad throughout his life On a short visit to India after 46 years of exile Tarak in a public homage to Jatin's contribution in forming an independent nationalist government in India, underlined the importance Jatin had attached to discipline and military training"[1]

Some time in 1906 acting under Jatin's instruction, Nikhileswar Ray Maulik (of the Chhatra-Bhandar unit) introduced Naren Chatterjee to two Jat officers stationed at the Fort William (Calcutta) Suranjan Singh and Ram Gopal These officers accompanied by other members of various regiments, went with Naren to Bhuvan Mukherjee's place in Shibpur to meet Nanigopal Sen gupta (the formidable leader of the region) Soon finding it risky to cross the Ganges Jatin recommended that Naren took the army men to Dr Sarat Mitra in Khidirpur Suranjan and Naren toured widely in Upper India and visited several cantonments winning over more soldiers While during the Howrah Case (1910 11) Jatin was being accused of waging war against the King Emperor' and "seducing of troops'[2] the 10th Jat Regiment was disbanded after court martial of the serious offenders Ceaseless in his endeavour after his release in 1911 Jatin encouraged Panchugopal Banerjee (of the *Aryamitras* hostel near Sealdah station) to go with Nikhileswar and renew contacts with the Fort William Officers, Dr Mitra having not yet been released the leadership of the Khidirpur unit as well as the task of indoctrinating the soldiers fell on Asutosh Ghose (a teacher) and Durgacharan Basu Simultaneously Basanta Biswas (member of the Poragacha unit in Nadia directly under Jatin's guidance) went to Dehra Dun in 1911 to request Rashbehari Bose to contact Naren Chatterjee absconding in Upper India, though pursuing his work in the cantonments His tory recognises that Rashbehari's meeting with Jatin added a new impulse to the former's revolutionary zeal and he discovered in Jatin the 'real leader of men'"[3] It is learnt that advised by Jatin Rashbehari made preparations for capturing the Fort William at

the outbreak of the War in 1914 [1] One of the plans that Jatin had cherished most was the nationalisation of this Fort, symbol of India's bondage But, unfortunately, in spite of all possible precautions the mass insurrection of February 21, 1915 (under the combined leadership of Jatin and Rashbehari) failed owing to an approver India lost some of her most precious sons like V G Pingle and Kartar Singh Luckily enough it was not altogether a failure the 12th and 23rd Cavalry the 128th Pioneers and the 7th Rajput regiments inside India, and the 5th Light Infantry and the Malaya States Guides in Singapore entered the black list of the British authorities for sedition — We need not remind the readers about Jatin's grandiose scheme of the Indo German Pact and his self undoing an episode too well known

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Foremost among the major contributions of Jatin Mukherjee in India's freedom fight was that he had worked out a perfect humanity within and around himself before achieving an integral strength capable of surrendering everything to India the Divine Mother Then, while initiating his compatriots to the cult of *man-making* as taught by Bankim and Vivekananda—the *anushilan*—Jatin sought to transform the hatred and violence (couched in the subconsciousness of an enslaved nation) into a motivation for acting against the existing state of affair This violence was not only to be oriented against the oppressors but—above all—sublimated into a determination to *die* for the country with the disinterested passion compatible with *karma-yoga* First came the heroic age of individual martyrdom Khudiram, Praphulla Chaki Kanailal Datta Satyen Basu, Charu Basu Biren Datta Gupta were the highlights of that glorious period Next came the turn of small-scale guerrilla resistance, beginning with Jatin's own decisive battle in Balasore on September 9, 1915 Tehjana in Pabna (1917) Gauhati (1918), Kaltabazar in Dacca (1918), the armoury raid in Chittagong (1930) the Veranda-battle at the Calcutta Secretariat (1930), Alfred Park in Allahabad (1931)—all these steps led to Netaji Subhashchandra's spectacular operation (1941) The culmination of this revolutionary movement gave to Gandhiji's ultimate action the indispensable implications which could no more be denied Echoing the convictions of eminent witnesses of this history, Arun Chandra Guha rightly defines Jatin Mukherjee as

the guiding spirit of the whole plan the SYMBOL of their hopes and aims Despite all the limitations of the Extremist leaders of those pre 1914 years admits Rajani Palme Dutt they had achieved a great and lasting work the Indian claim to freedom had for the first time during those years been brought to the forefront of world political questions and the seed of the aim of complete national liberation and of determined struggle to achieve it had been implanted in the political movement and was destined in the subsequent years to strike root in the masses of the people " The fight for India s freedom was but a first step towards the accomplishment of a new brotherhood based on international unity

NOTES

1 *Men I Met* M N Roy p 4 Bombay 1968 (reprinted from *Independent India* Feb 27 1949)
2 *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti* Indugopal Mukherjee p 411 Calcutta, 1954
3 *Ibid* p 412
4 *Resurgent India* Sisirkumar Mitra, p 367 Bombay 1963
5 *India under Morley and Minto* M N Das p 22 London 1964
6 *The Statesman* Calcutta Jan 28 1910
7 *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries* Uma Mukherjee, p 166 Calcutta 1966
8 *Ibid* p 168
9 *Panbark Katha* Lalitkumar Chatterjee p 98 Calcutta 1947
10 *Durgotsav* Lalitkumar Chatterjee p 20 Calcutta 1936
11 *Home & Political Proceedings* Govt of India Aug 1907 No 106
12 *First Spark of Revolution* Arun Chandra Guha p 162 Delhi 1971
13 *Dwitiya Swadhinata Sangram* Dr Bhupendranath Dutta p 168 Calcutta 1949
14 Pavitra Datta s statement to Bhupendrakumar Datta in Prithwindra Mukherjee Sadhak Biplabi Jatindranath *Saptahik Basumati* p 1623 Calcutta 1965 66
15 *First Spark* p 110 Also *Dwitiya* publishes a statement by Atin Basu It is Basu who paid Rashbehari s trip to Japan in 1915
16 Proceedings of the Howrah Case (1910 11) cf *Saptahik* pp 1620 1622 In this Report we find the despair of the British unable to trace the *true* leader of these units working in synchro

mission without any apparent interdependence The Authorities recognise that except in the case of Sri Aurobindo (owing to Baren Ghose's confession) it has always left them perplexed trying to get hold of the Brain behind This is an indirect tribute to Jatin's master mind

17 *First Spark* p 161 Also Nolinikanto Kar's statement in *Saptahik* p 1423

18 *Index to Notes on Outrages* J C Nixon ICS 1917 Also in *Aurobindo & Jugantar* A C Guha, pp 86 87, Calcutta n d

19 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself* , p 39, Pondicherry, 1953

20 *Political Trouble in India* J C Ker ICS p 120 Delhi, 1973 repr Also consult (i) *Norwich University* 1890 91, Vol III, pp 490 491, Montpelier 1911 Illustrated with 2 of Tarak's photos (ii) The Vermont Education of Taraknath Das', Ronald Spector in *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society* Vol 48, No 2, 1980, pp 89 95

21 *Anandabazar Patrika* Calcutta Sept 10 1952

22 *Sedition Committee Report 1918* Justice Rowlatt Annexure 1, para 6 The Howrah Gang Case

23 *Two Great* , p 119

24 *Ibid* p 118 Also *Biplabi Jibaner* pp 412, 645 648 660

25 'Agniyuger nandikar Bagha Jatin Prithwindra Mukherjee in *Desh* p 48 Calcutta, Dec 1, 1979

26 *First Spark* , p 393

27 *India Today* Rajani Palme Dutt pp 331 332, Calcutta, 1970 (2nd Indian Edition)

WAHHABI MOVEMENT IN INDIA

QEYAMUDDIN AHMAD

EARLY PRE 1857 PHASE OF THE MOVEMENT

The process of social change is a continuous one but at times its pace becomes markedly sharp and clear The 19th century in India was one such period In the field of religion it witnessed some major reform movements affecting both the Hindu and Muslim communities in various ways These reform movements were both of a modernist and fundamentalist type though the line of distinction between the two is not always clear cut nor can it be drawn strictly chronologically

The movement popularly called the Wahhabi Movement in India[1] was one of the earliest and important ones of the period and its effects on the Indo Muslim society were wide and lasting It was started by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786 1831) popularly remembered as a *shahid* (martyr) in the second decade of the 19th century and remained quite active during the next half a century The roots of the movement however are traceable to a much earlier period in the history of Islam On various occasions the adherents of Islam had come to feel that their compatriots and co religionists had deviated from what they regarded as the basic tenets of the faith and were generally losing their moorings This feeling had been expressed earlier even during the heydays of the Mughal Empire but had become sharper during the late 18th century as a result of political disintegration The extensive writings of the famous scholar and theologian Shah Waliullah (1702 1763) of Delhi provide a representative expression of this feeling and of some remedial action for improving the situation Sayyid Shah Waliullah's ideas and built up an organisation to carry them to the people and to implement them He was ably assisted in this Shah Waliullah's ideas and built up an orginisation to carry them to the people and to implement them He was ably assisted in this

work by a number of devoted and capable disciples such as Shah Ismail *Shahid* Abdul Hayy Wilayat Ali and many others

It may be clarified at the outset that the use of the term 'Wahhabi' in relation to the movement organised by Sayyid Ahmad, and called by him *Tariqa i Muhammadi* is incorrect It is based on the wrong assumption that Sayyid Ahmad and his followers were influenced by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703 92) of Arabia There are certain similarities between the two movements because of a common root but there are some differences too, and there is no evidence of Sayyid Ahmad being directly influenced by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab There were ulterior motives behind the use of the appellation Wahhabi Some of the over-zealous actions of the Arabian Wahhabis had earned them a bad name among the Muslims in India and elsewhere In the eyes of the British officials, on the other hand the Wahhabis were synonymous with 'rebels' By calling Sayyid Ahmad s followers Wahhabis the contemporary British officers wanted to dub them as 'rebels in the higher circles of the government and the army, and as desecrators of shrines' among the general Muslims It gradually became a term of religio political abuse in the 19th century The epithet has been retained here in view of its wide currency and without in any way subscribing to its wrong assumption

The Wahhabis are not essentially different from the rest of the Sunni Muslims, though they admit the right of *ijtehad* (right to form judgement on matters of theology and law) They do not follow exclusively any of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence but base themselves primarily on the *Quran* and *Hadith*, and if necessary consider themselves free to draw upon any of the four above mentioned schools

The main aspects of Sayyid Ahmad s ideas as represented in *Sirat-i Mustaqim*, which was compiled in Persian by Shah Ismail and Shah Abdul Hayy on the basis of Sayyid Ahmad's observations may be summarised as (i) strong affirmation of monotheism, (ii) uncompromising denunciation of *Bid'āt* (reprehensible innovations in religion) and (iii) advocacy of *jihād*. Sayyid Ahmad conceived of *jihād* mainly in religious and moral terms, but at the same time he was conscious of the political situation in the country particularly the increasing political dominance of 'the vendors of merchandise' and 'foreigners from distant lands' He realised

the importance of controlling the levers of political power for implementing his programme of reforms but there was a Garibaldian trait in his character He wanted to bring about a certain situation and then to return to his spiritual pursuits

He also emphasised the obligation and the necessity of *Hijrat* (Migration) from British India which he viewed as a *Darul Harb* The fight against the British Government was to be waged as between two states from outside British territory Accordingly, he migrated with a large party of volunteers from British India to the tribal territory on the north western frontier in 1826 The area was selected on religious and tactical grounds It was considered obligatory to migrate from British territory Besides Sayyid Ahmad had been assured of support by the Pathan chiefs of that area Some of them were nominally under the Sikh government but their allegiance was constantly shifting Sayyid Ahmad's primary interest was in British India as he repeatedly mentioned in his various *Letters*[7] and not in the tribal area But having selected that area as his base he got entangled in a series of wars against some local Pathan chiefs and Sikh commanders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's government He met with some preliminary success and was able to establish an independent state of moderate resources It received a constant supply of men and money from British India through the efforts of the numerous Wahhabi centres established there Ultimately, Sayyid Ahmad died fighting against a Sikh force under the command of Sher Singh in the battle of Balakote (May 1831)

The movement remained dormant for some time after it but was revived by Sayyid Ahmad's followers Among these the activities of Wilayat Ali (1790 1852) and his brother Enayat Ali (1794 1858) belonging to the Sadiqpur family of Patna, are particularly notable They strengthened the internal organisation of the movement and established district centres all over Bengal and in other parts of the country Enayat Ali worked extensively and for long among the peasantry of the interior areas of Bengal The response there was particularly encouraging because of the earlier work done by the followers of Haji Shariatullah (1781 1840) the *Faraidis* whose aims and activities were in many respects similar to that of the Wahhabis The main work of the district centres was to propagate the mission and to forward men and money to the headquarters[8] at Patna from where they were sent on to the north

western frontier area Arrangements were made for ensuring the safety of volunteers travelling to the distant frontier areas by setting up intermediate points of halt headed by reliable secret agents all along the Grand Trunk Road from Bengal to the north western frontier Code words and cyphers were developed for transmitting secret messages Thus a steady flow of men and money continued from British India particularly from the interior areas of Bengal which sustained the Wahhabi state on the frontier

THE WAHHABIS AND THE RISING OF 1857

The period of the leadership of the Wahhabi movement by Wilayat Ali and Enayat Ali coincides with that of the movement of 1857 59 For a time the two movements ran along parallel lines meeting and converting on some points but not merging completely This phase of the Wahhabi movement has not been given proper attention and the attitude of the Wahhabis to the great rising of 1857 has not been examined in its proper perspective It is important to note that when the great rising took place the Wahhabis had already been active against the British government for about three decades and that they continued their activities till long after its suppression The Wahhabis wanted the war against the British government to be waged from outside as between two states The rising on the other hand was essentially an attempt from inside the country to overthrow the British government by force It was spearheaded by the Indian units of the Army but it enjoyed widespread civilian support

Among all the recent writers on the movement of 1857 59 only S N Sen[3] and R C Majumdar have drawn attention to the significant fact that the Wahhabis as a group did not identify themselves with the revolt While this is true of some of the Wahhabi centres in British India particularly those in Bihar and Bengal Sen and Majumdar have made this remark applicable to the Wahhabis as a whole which is not quite correct As we know during 1857 58 Enayat Ali joined hands with the soldiers of 55th Native Infantry at Mardan who had mutinied and fled across the border He gave them shelter and along with them fought many engagements against the British on the frontier A powerful expeditionary force was sent under Sir Sydney Cotton

in 1858 with the express object of suppressing the Wahhabis and their allies the mutinous soldiers of some of the regiments in that area It is incorrect to maintain that the Wahhabis did not fight against the British at all during 1857-58 Their frontier party under Enayat Ali constantly fought against the British during that period though they did so on their own, without joining hands with the local leaders of the movement of 1857-59 The superior military resources of the British which enabled them meet the challenge of so many scattered centres of revolt' all over northern India enabled them to meet this one additional source of opposition as well Material and technological superiority was one crucial advantage possessed by the British over their Indian opponents and it could not have been materially affected by the action of the Wahhabis

A curious notion seems to have prevailed in some circles that it would detract from the anti-British character of the movement if it was contended that some of the Wahhabi centres inside British India did not openly participate in the other movement The different political situation in the two areas, as also some tactical considerations, governed the Wahhabi attitude in this matter The open struggle of the type fought by Enayat Ali on the north western frontier was neither possible nor desirable under the Wahhabi system of supply centres in British India which provided the sinews of war to the frontier state The district centres were expected to continue with the more substantial if less spectacular work of procuring the vital supplies

TRIAL OF WAHHABI LEADERS

During 1850s and 1860s, the Wahhabis built up a state of considerable area with a moderately equipped army and a skeleton staff of civil functionaries It was this 'Fanatics' Colony' which challenged again and again the might of the British government in India Three major military expeditions were sent to the frontier in 1852 1858 and 1863 for the destruction of the Wahhabi state Of these the Ambeyla campaign (1863) was the biggest More than 9000 regular troops were employed The Wahhabis were, of course, defeated but at a heavy cost The British losses numbered 847 killed and wounded including the commander of the force General Chamberlain The hard knocks suffered by the

government turned the attention of the authorities to the Wahhabi centres within their jurisdiction A large number of Wahhabis were arrested, and some of them were charged with the offence of waging war against the Queen' or of abetting that attempt The Ambala Trial (1863) and the Patna Trial (1865) followed thereafter Twelve persons representing a cross section of Indo-Muslim society were imprisoned Of these, one turned an approver and was released The rest were sentenced to transportation and sent to the dreaded Andaman Islands penal colony Many of them were not destined to return but two, Muhammad Jafar Thanesari and Abdul Rahim returned home after serving 18 years of rigorous imprisonment and wrote books which contain an account of their arrest, trial and life in the penal colony

With the recent publication of R C Majumdar's book, *Andaman's Penal Settlement* some light has been thrown on the life of political and other prisoners in the penal colony, popularly called *Kala Pani* But this book does not cover the earlier period of its history, the last quarter of the 19th century when the Wahhabis and other prisoners were there for which the above-mentioned Urdu books constitute a rare, primary source-material Muhammad Jafar writes that the islands, constituting the settlement, were of different sizes separated from each other by shallow seas and wide rivers Most of these were jungle infested and interspersed with mountain ranges, the highest peak of Mt Herriott being 11000 feet high The climate was so 'poisonous' that anyone having a wound usually died soon after as a result of its getting gangrenous Grains for feeding the convicts were brought from Calcutta which was five days' journey by steamer Means of communication were almost non existent and supplies of essential articles scarce One inhuman practice formerly in vogue was the branding of the words 'transported for life' on the body of the prisoners It was stopped just before the Wahhabis arrived and they were spared the ordeal Another revolting feature was a sort of racial and colour discrimination European convicts and Indian Christians received preferential treatment They were given bungalows and servants free of charge On the other hand Jafar narrates the tragic case of the Raja of Jagannath Puri who was sent to the island in 1879 Being of a black complexion he was put to work with shoesmiths and given the coarsest meal while an Anglo Indian of 'low descent' who had

arrived simultaneously was given much better treatment Unable to bear these indignities and the corporal punishments the unfortunate Raja died soon after On reaching the island, the Wahhabi prisoners' chains were cut and they were allowed to live normally after the performance of such manual labour as was imposed on them Those who were educated could be employed for some office work for which they were paid On completion of 12 years imprisonment a prisoner could set up some business with the money he might have saved

The Ambala and Patna Trials did not mean an end to the government s drive against the Wahhabi organisations Further secret enquiries continued and a second round of trials began at Patna in 1871, in which the accused persons including Amir Khan and Hashmatdad Khan (the famous hides merchants of Calcutta) were charged with various offences—giving financial help to the movement participating in the Ambeyla campaign giving military training to the recruits on the frontier etc All the accused except Hashmatdad Khan were sentenced to the by now standardised punishment of imprisonment for life in the Andaman Islands and confiscation of all properties Thus ended the last round of the government proceedings against the Wahhabis but the flame was not altogether extinguished It continued to smoulder and occasionally burst out in sharp flashes

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE MOVEMENT

The Wahhabi movement had two main aspects—socio religious and political The former aimed at the self correction of some aspects of the Indo Muslim society and the latter the fight against the foreigners from distant lands Both these as also *other factors influenced the movement during the course of its* progress Their relative importance was not static throughout the period but kept on changing There is however a perceptible trend showing that the political character gradually gained the upper hand Sir William Hunter whose well known book *Our Indian Musalmans*[8] represents the first attempt to present a systematic though not very dispassionate account of the Wahhabi Movement in English also points out this subtle change in the character of the movement 'The religious element in the revival', he writes 'soon began to lose its power Even under the

early leaders of the movement it showed signs of wearing out 'The Patna Propaganda' clearly perceived this and suited their teachings to the new requirements of the time The wars fought on the frontier during 1850s and 1860s had hardly any religious issues at stake It may also be noted that with this change in emphasis from religious preachings to political propaganda, the extent and influence of the movement also widened

It often used to be remarked that the movement was directed against the Sikhs As stated above, Sayyid Ahmad selected the north-western tribal area as the base of his operation for certain ideological and practical considerations This brought him into conflict with the Sikh government, but as he repeatedly states in his *letters*, his main concern was with British India As for the anti Sikh aspect, it covers only a few years out of the long history of the movement, and does not represent its main objective Sayyid Ahmad fought as much, if not more, against the Muslim tribal chiefs of that area Can it be argued, therefore that the movement was directed against the Pathans? Finally the Wahhabi activities continued long after the annexation (1849) of the Punjab In fact, the most active phase of the movement is covered by the period following this annexation

The Wahhabi movement, like any other movement which remained active over a large area for a long period of time passed through different phases Any generalisation regarding the character of the movement as a whole is therefore apt to be misleading It is primarily because of a neglect of the post 1831 phase of the movement when a country wide anti government organisation was built up and a series of open wars fought on the north-western frontier that a lop-sided view has generally been taken of the nature of the movement

The roots of the movement as stated above, can be traced to a much earlier period in the history of Islam A number of factors not always complementary went into the making of the movement In a brilliant analysis of the role of the Wahhabis in the rising of 1857 K M Ashraf[10] has very rightly drawn attention to the rather strange fact that although one comes across frequent references to the role of the Wahhabis during the period one does not get a clear or comprehensive understanding of it He goes on to explain that '. the Wahhabis were the only people who

came not only armed with a consistent anti British ideology but also with the backing of a network of organised centres spread all over northern India, with contacts in the south and moral influence on the Muslim intelligentsia throughout the country In a sense the Wahhabi outlook on politics and religious life embodied the century old hostility of the Muslim ruling classes to the growing encroachments of the British, as also the urgings of the working masses for better and happier conditions of life It is not, therefore, surprising if the Wahhabi leaders of the day displayed both the vigour and tenacity of the working people and the confusions of a decadent ruling class

The Wahhabi Movement left behind an inspiring tradition of a heroic and sustained struggle against the British and also a model for the formation of a well knit all-India organisation to conduct that struggle With their secret cells in the Indian Army and their contacts in some of the Indian States such as Tonk, Hyderabad and Gwalior the Wahhabis had prepared the ground to some extent for the leaders of the 1857 rising It also enabled the Wahhabis themselves to capture the leadership at some places during 1857-59 The role of Bakht Khan in Delhi is a good example of it

The Wahhabis were the first to realise the crucial role of the Indian units of the British Army in India and made conscious efforts to win them over, or 'to tamper their allegiance', as the contemporary official English records put it

Some of the methods initiated and practised by the Wahhabis, such as passive non cooperation the boycott of British Courts, the Panchayati system etc, were subsequently adopted and improved upon by the early political parties, including the Indian National Congress It may be of interest to refer here to a speech delivered by Surendranath Banerjee[11] at a meeting in Calcutta in July 1883 for raising a National Fund 'How do the Wahhabis', he said, 'raise their fund? I speak of the Wahhabi reformers and not the Wahhabi rebels' so you need not be afraid They do it in this way Every householder puts by a handful of rice before he takes his meal and these handfuls are all collected in course of a week, and then they are taken to a mosque for the Wahhabi Missionary to come round and take them up In this

way a Fund is raised for the maintenance of the Wahhabi Mission

One of the most vigorous reform movements in Islam in India, the Wahhabi Movement evoked a strong sense of identity among Indian Muslims and brought about significant social reforms Politically, it drew attention to the foreign domination and made the earliest most protracted and sustained attempt to counter it Negatively its failure in the political field drew the attention of the members of the community to alternative courses of action, including that which Sayyid Ahmad's namesake—Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan—was to advocate That marked the beginning of the modernisation of the Indo Muslim society

NOTES

1 For a detailed account see my *The Wahhabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1966

2 Q Ahmad, *op cit*, pp 326-27, 357-58

3 S N Sen, *1857* R C Majumdar, *The Mutiny and Revolt of 1857*

4 *Ibid*

5 Sen *op cit*, p 248, Majumdar, *op cit* p 37

6 Q Ahmad *op cit*, pp 177-209

7 Publications Division, Govt of India

8 Sir William Hunter *Our Indian Musalmans*, London, 1871 p. 68

9 It means the Patna Centre of the Wahhabis

10 K M Ashraf 'Muslim Revivalists and the Revolt of 1857', P C Joshi (ed), *Rebellion, 1857*, PPH, 1957, pp 71-103

11 *Printed Report of the Progs of a National Fund Meeting* held on the 17th July, 1883, Sen Press (Calcutta) 1883

12 The distinction between the Wahhabi 'reformers and 'rebels' was drawn purposely so that the authorities might not take objection to the adoption of a method used by 'rebels'

MILITANT NATIONALISM IN BENGAL

PRADYOT KUMAR GHOSH

For about three decades following the year 1905 Bengal was the theatre for violent outbursts of militant nationalism Commonly called terrorism the movement waxed and waned many times before it virtually died out about the year 1937 Its very nature precluded it from representing the majority Nevertheless it deeply influenced the moral and cultural life of Bengal A revolutionary or a Biplabi, as he was called was the hero of the twentieth century social milieu of the Bengali Hindu A rich corpus of Bengali fiction poems biographical writings and popular historical narratives added substantially to make him a legend There are few if any other societies where a believer in overt violence is esteemed so highly The three decades mentioned above further are referred to in the political literature as *agnyug* or the age of fire a fact that showed its phenomenal significance

It is among the curiosities of history that the unwarlike Bengali begot the most daring bands of revolutionaries Police Officers, administrators scholars and the revolutionaries themselves strove to answer this question Militancy and bodily prowess however, had been the means of livelihood of the lowcaste Hindus like Namasudras who provided the landlords of Bengal with lathials or professional clubmen[1] But it was the leisured and educated bhadralok with marked aversion to manual work who came out to disturb peace and cause discomfort to government Although the revolutionary workers came from this somewhat unlikely section of the society it is necessary to note that the entire bhadralok population of Bengal did not subscribe to this variety of patriotism It had further more critics than admirers among them The average Bengali reacted to it with awe and unconcealed panic Despite all these, the movement caused such an emotional stir in Bengal as to compel a civil servant to search for its roots in the temperamental peculiarity of the Bengali[3]

R H Craddock, the Officer in question, is not entirely mistaken in his assessment of the emotional life of a Bengali Hindu It is, however true that India was not traditionally antipathetic towards violence Her history is as sanguinary as that of any other country The Shakta philosophy, in particular, that deeply influenced a Bengali Hindu of the upper caste made violence a commendable virtue under certain conditions

It, however stands beyond doubt that the revolutionary movement in Bengal was a part of the organic and emotional development of the bhadralok population

THE SOCIAL BASE

The Bengali word bhadralok meaning a gentleman does not strictly correspond to the 'middle class 'Bhadralok', L S S O Malley correctly observes is a name given to the three higher Hindu castes viz Brahmans Kayasthas and Baidyas, and Muhammadans of birth, breeding and education [4] 'It is a category that includes the richest and the poorest of the community Both Lord Satyendra Prasanna Sinha and a village school teacher belonged to it A measure of education a way of life, and as stated above aversion to manual work were the attributes of a bhadralok He is not necessarily town bred He is the common element in both urban and rural life of Bengal' [5] A large number of bhadralok owned land from which their income is wholly and partly derived This phenomenon had its origin in the Permanent Settlement of 1793 which aimed at ensuring flow of capital to land by fixing state demand on it It created not only big landlords but also 'an extraordinary system of subinfeudation by which layer upon layer of idle rent chargers have been interposed between the zamindar and ryot' [6] Most of these people represented the lower strata of the bhadralok order and belonged to the middle and lower classes A substantial proportion of these sections lacked any serious occupation to fill their time By the sheer necessity of circumstances they were forced to intrigue and foment strifes among the villagers A shade of official opinion held this fact as one of the factors that led to revolutionary terrorism Truly this element constituted a vital social force in the rural Bengal With paucity of European officials in proportion to population in the interior of Bengal with no administrative

unit smaller than a subdivision, the entire rural population was left to rally round the bhadralok, transforming the latter into a powerful institution Nevertheless it would be an over statement to hold that this explained the outburst of revolutionary move ment But it was a condition, and a vital one, in the develop ment of violent political unrest in Bengal

Besides landowning the bhadralok followed professions, like lawyers, physicians priests and worked as government officials clerks and teachers These professional and service interests re presented about one fourth of the bhadralok population in the Faridpur District[9] This seems to be true of other districts too The legal profession and teaching of all other avocations played an important part in the political and social life The Bar Libra ries, said R M Craddock *were particularly influential and capa* ble of rendering district officers timid[10]

The bhadralok population of Bengal underwent a spectacular transformation during the nineteenth century Known as Bengal Renaissance, the development represented a vital reflex of the British rule It is true that the caste-privileges and social pri macy of bhadralok existed before the British conquest But he gained in importance as a necessity of the alien administration It required Indian personnel to keep it going Also the aforesaid system of land tenure put a section of the bhadraloks on a solid social footing It became necessary for him to learn English Efforts of Christian missionaries provided the English education with the necessary initial drive Rich Zamindars like Jai Krish na Mukhopadhyaya of Uttarpara also played a remarkable role in the establishment of English schools at district headquarters, sub divisional towns and even obscure villages[11] The development *of English education became a fact of life in Bengal about* the middle of the nineteenth century and hit a high tempo of growth by the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth cen tury The Dacca District had a student population of 1 449 in 1856 57 and 78 834 in 1892 93 In 1909-10 the district had forty five High schools two colleges and one medical school with a roll strength totalling at 86,586[1] The establishment of Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817 and the Government's deci sion in 1835 in favour of western education constituted a power ful base, further, for an intellectual awakening in Bengal

The development of Western education could be an isolated fact of history if its only purpose was turning out clerks and low-ranking officers But it became an inseparable part of an awakening of Hindu mind to a new awareness Historically it is said to have started with Ram Mohun Roy who pressed for social reforms and presented through the Brahmo movement a new interpretation of the Hindu religion by trying to make it monotheistic Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, a teacher of the Hindu College with a short life-span of twentythree years left a band of pupils who showed powerful intellect in attempting to tear apart the age old Hindu beliefs With lack of sustained ideology and efforts for changing the society they failed to leave behind them anything beyond a confused spirit of criticism and protest[14] In 1851 was founded the British Indian Association marking the incipients of a mere semblance of organized political behaviour, correctly and mercilessly ridiculed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya[15] What was induced by all these were conflicts in opinions and attitudes generating a variegated thought-movement Questions of social reforms, political notions and cultural views were the salient features of the movement The Brahmo movement underwent splits twice creating the Adi Navabidhan and Sadharan Brahmo Samaj In 1876 the Indian Association was established to initiate the politics of asking for constitutional concessions

The effect of the thought movement was clearly evident in two fields of activities—religious movements and literature After years of doubts and controversies a new kind of Hinduism emerged to influence the gentry Ramakrishna Paramhansa born as Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya not only reformed the Hindu faith in a simple and powerful manner but declared unequivocally that all faiths led to salvation[16] His worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda the culture *hero* of the Bengali society he belonged to held out that *vedanta* was the future universal religion and that lack of independence leading to a moral decline had made India incapable of carrying out this mission of universalizing *vedanta*[17] Thus was laid the moral foundation on which revolutionary movement was ultimately if not directly reared

Owing largely to the western influence and religious controversy the Bengali literature was processed into a vigorous and many sided phenomenon Ram Mohun Roy Iswar Chandra Vidya-

sagar Iswar Chandra Gupta Michael Madhusudan Datta among others pioneered the growth of prose poetry fiction drama and journalism

The renaissance as the movement was called had many short falls It touched only a section of the educated gentry Essentially a Hindu movement it kept the Muslims outside its ambit It accentuated the already existing differences between the bhadralok and the low caste majority Its operational area was a narrow social frame riddled by inner contradictions Yet it established *the social setting of the contemporary political behaviour*

IDEAS AND INSPIRATIONS

It is true that the whole gamut of the socio cultural growth in the nineteenth century Bengal did not induce revolutionary violence in any real sense Nor the violent agrarian tribal and partly religious resistance to British authority before the rise of nationalism were relevant for such development Nevertheless they set moral background for the movement

Michael Madhusudan Datta and Rangalal Bandopadhyava in their poetical works preached nationalist feelings which had certain indefinite emotional effect During the second half of the nineteenth century patriotism was one of the main themes of Bengali literature The entire endeavour in this direction consisted of glorification of the past and pointing out the declining physical might and morals of the Bengalis The chief exponent of this tendency was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyava Born in 1838 Bankim Chandra was the first graduate of the Calcutta University who was offered a position in the uncovenanted civil service and served as a Deputy Magistrate Pacesetter in the Bengali prose writing he edited since 1872 a monthly named the *Bangadarsan* which came to be noted for its vigorous and incisive criticism [1]

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya was largely responsible for drawing up an emotional landscape where revolutionary violence could look natural A number of his novels depicted warlike exploits wherein the author gave vent to his hatred of the aggressor and the oppressor In *Durgeshnandini* (1868) the aggressor Katlu Khan was murdered in a manner which a revolutionary would like to follow In *Chandrasekhar Sitaram Raj Singha*

Ananda Math and *Devi Chaudhurani* the spirit of armed resistance was given an idealised and spiritual character In *Sitaram* he restored to more than rightful place in history of a forgotten Bengali local chief of Bhusna on the border of the Jessore and Faridpur Districts who resisted the Mughal onslaught Particularly relevant for our purpose are *Devi Chaudhurani* and *Ananda Math* Both the novels were based on the exploits of the Sanyasi raiders of the eighteenth century Bengal *Devi Chaudhurani*s heroine Profullamukhi was a neglected housewife of a polygamous upper caste Hindu family She was given a thorough spiritual and physical training by one Bhawani Pathak and was placed at the head of a group of rebels who offered a violent resistance to the East India Company and its native underlings They were ultimately crushed to defeat Bhawani Pathak who was deported for life discovered that *nishkam karmabad* or passionless devotion to duty was unsuitable for women

Both Bhawani Pathak and Devi Chaudhurani were historical personages The former a Bhojpuri was an associate of a Fakir called Majnu Shah and committed a number of dacoities in Rangpur and Mymensingh In 1787 some merchants trading between Rangpur and Dacca complained that their boats were robbed by Pathak On 9 June 1787 Pathak was killed in an encounter with an armed detachment commanded by Lieutenant Brennan It was also known that a female dacoit known as Devi Chaudhurani who lived in a boat worked in cooperation with Pathak The Collector of Rangpur, however did not think it fit to put her under arrest [35]

The facts turned into a fascinating work of art by Bankim Chandra's lively imagination Its effects on the gentry of Bengal in the nineteenth century was purely literary and without any noticeable political connotation For the time being its message remained dormant

In 1882 Bankim Chandra's *Ananda Math* was published It was, by itself not a sensational event But the novel had two significant points for the purpose of history It glorified for the first time the Sanyasi raiders as patriots Herein also Bankim coined the slogan *Bande Mataram* which subsequently became battle cry of the nationalist India The events of this novel had as backdrop the famine of 1769 70 an incident of deadly signi-

ficance in the history of Bengal A band of Sanyasis led by Swami Satyananda who defied India fought the East India Company and the government of puppet Nawab of Bengal The band was a secret society with deep religious orientation and anti Muslim bias

It is important to note that both in *Devi Chaudhurani* and *Ananda Math* the rebels were defeated Nobody could question the correct historical judgement of this conclusion But there was more to it In *Ananda Math* Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya the Deputy Magistrate welcomed the British rule as embodiment of law and order In his other writings however he presented an element of self contradiction Was the British rule really beneficial to the country? He did not question certain material benefit that it brought in its train But he was emphatic that it did not do an iota of good to the poor peasants It had actually deepened their distress [19]

Another relevant point that Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya clearly stated was a spiritual poverty and lack of physical prowess from which the Bengali suffered as a race He wrote

Occasionally one hears of the physical strength of the people of other provinces of India but no one ever hears any praise of the Bengali on that score Everyone believes that we are weak coward effeminate who run away from any possibility of danger Not to speak of others many Bengalis believe in its truth [20]

He admitted that the statement was largely true so far as the Bengali of the nineteenth century was concerned But he refused to be a negative critic He held that there was a number of causes that led to the moral and physical decline of the Bengali He lamented that no one ever tried to enquire into the causes of *this total decline However there was nothing to prove the eternal* worthlessness of Bengali In the past he pointed out the Bengali was proverbial for his physical might The material reasons of his downfall were many But what hurt Bankim Chandra deeply was the lack of historical awareness of the Bengali that led to the latter's spiritual defeat His History was a collection of falsehoods and fairy tales Bankim Chandra found it impossible for example to believe that Baktyar Khilji conquered Bengal with a contingent of seventeen horsemen He wrote that this false account was left by Minhaj us Siraj who wrote after sixty

years of the incident. The Bengali who believed in such a lie, Bankim Chandra emphatically declared, was a blemish to his race.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya with his glorification of the past, criticism of the situation of his own time, introduction of the cult of motherland and concept of secret societies left a message for the posterity. His appeal to his contemporaries rested purely on his contribution to letters. His philosophical dissertations, Krishnacharitra and Anushilan, were likewise without political motives. In these works he preached that the fullest development of the moral and physical qualities was the goal of human life. There is nothing to dispute that this idea was relevant for the development of the concept of self discipline among the revolutionary secret societies. It was only an aspect of the gigantic intellectual force represented by him that led to militant nationalism of the kind that had its inception after more than a decade of his death. There were other factors that established the logical connection between him and the revolutionaries. In reality when the revolutionary workers looked back for an intellectual inspiration, they found in Bankim Chandra's writing a clear message for them.

The importance of Swami Vivekananda in the sociocultural context of the nineteenth century Bengal has already been stated. The official enquiry on revolutionary movement saw seeds of danger in the theological teachings. It did not however hold him responsible for political violence. But a number of writers saw in him the very fountainhead of revolutionary outburst. His brother, Dr. Bhupendra Nath Datta, said that the Swami once remarked that Bengal was in need of, both and bomb alone.[8]

Besides Vedanta Vivekananda unequivocally spelt out two significant ideas. He stressed on the need of strong active and self-reliant manhood and urged his countrymen to take pride in being Indians. He expressed his deep sense of unhappiness with the conditions of his country and called upon the youth to work relentlessly to relieve her distress. Embodiment of youthful energy, Vivekananda stirred the youth with a new concept of values. He frowned on the idea of living purposelessly and held emphatically that philanthropic and patriotic impulses were parts of meaningful existence. The Swami, who died at thirty nine in 1902, continued to influence the youth of Bengal deeper and

deeper as the decades rolled on It became a part of discipline of the revolutionary secret societies to read his works thoroughly He became the model for revolutionaries He was also instrumental in making patriotism an essential virtue

Both Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Swami Vivekananda were violent in their condemnation of the English educated gentry of Bengal This condemnation further was significant as the believers in revolutionary violence came from that section of the society Vivekananda was strongly critical of those who ape Europeans in everything.[9] Bankim Chandra went further in calling the babu a complete imbecile lacking character and purpose.[10] Both these men urged the youth to regard India as their highest religion and the only purpose to live and die for Over and over again they asked the latter to throw aside the temporary aberration that had hampered the development of their individuality and to build up character These teachings were apt to be institutionalized in the revolutionary secret societies of early twentieth century It is however true that neither the Deputy Magistrate turned novelist nor the handsome young saint proposed, at least in their writings to preach revolutionary violence The revolutionary movement was only one among the numerous possibilities that they inspired Their responsibilities for revolutionary movement was not more than Martin Luther's responsibility for the German peasantry's revolt during the early sixteenth century

The idea of a secret society was not altogether absent in Bengal during the nineteenth century The activities of the Irish rebels and the terrorist conspiracies in Europe influenced at least two important personages Rajnarain Basu, Aurobindo Ghosh's maternal grandfather and Sibnath Sastri the Brahmo leader with keen intellect paid serious thought to the possibility of enlisting youngmen for secret societies[11] Basu made no efforts to conceal his anti-British feelings on any occasion[12] But ideas of these two remarkable men were too anachronic to be realised Nevertheless they added a new element to the welter of thoughts that contributed to the revolutionary movement

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Neither the social settings nor the structure of ideas, as stated

above could make militant nationalism inevitable They only generated certain social and moral forces which were conducive to militant nationalism as one of the components of a complex pattern of political behaviour India as also noted above had seen a number of violent outbursts of tribal agrarian and religious unrest having neither social link nor ideological community with revolutionary terrorism But all these led to an accumulation of anti imperialist feelings among the literate and the sensitive section of the community

Around 1860 the indigo cultivators strike was the first instance of the gentry showing awareness of oppressed poor of the society The movement originated in the sufferings of the peasants who refused to abide by the contract requiring them to sow indigo The gentry having interest in land found a link of interest with the cultivators Harish Chandra Mukhopadhayaya the able editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* effectively stirred public opinion in favour of peasants Dinabandhu Mitra s *Nil Darpan* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyays *Bangadesher Krishak* were inspired by the indigo disturbance ' While the indigo question died out it led to deepening of hatred and mutual antipathy between the ruler and the ruled that had already begun anew with the Mutiny of 1857

For a period of half a century before the outbreak of the revolutionary violence the mental gulf between the Indians and Europeans in India had been widening Numerous instances were reported of respectable Indians insulted by Europeans on streets and in railway train ' The tea planters of Assam earned a notoriety for their oppression of the workers ' The cleavage became complete during the Ilbert Bill controversy of 1883

One of the liberal experiments of Ripon the Bill intended to extend the jurisdiction of the Indian Judges outside the presidency towns to the European British subjects It led to a sharp contradiction in which the educated Indians sided with Government Ending in a compromise between government and the Anglo Indians it added fresh fuel to the burning racial hatred

But the components of its historical background did not create anything for revolutionary movement besides generating unimplacable hatred for the rulers The violent nationalist thought was still a far cry But its positive steps were however taken In 1867 was founded the Hindu Mela among others by Rajna

rain Basu and Nabagopal Mitra It was discontinued in 1880 It was an annual fair which included exhibitions of handicraft and agricultural products discourses on nationalism and Hindu religion, recitation of poems singing of national songs and display of physical prowess and gymnastics The last item attracted particular attention The young Jatindra Nath Bandopadhayaya one of the pioneers of revolutionary movement in Bengal also inspired public admiration during such display This aspect of the Hindu Mela continued to interest the youth and physical culture became a regular movement in Calcutta The organizational part of revolutionary terrorism by all admissions originated in this movement of physical culture

In 1885 the Indian National Congress met in its first session A body of loyal and law abiding men of upper classes it was not expected to further the case for the revolutionaries But from its platform was heard the story of India's utter poverty during the British rule Romesh Chandra Dutta and Dadabhai Naoroji held the rulers responsible for such poverty The early Congress inspite of its loyal and constitutionalist approach did one thing that helped in a way the growth of violent anti British feelings It made the gentry feel that the aim of the British rule in India was not anything spiritual This notion was spread among the mass of the population owing to other reasons The police particularly that in the villages was a cruel and corrupt institution Its highhanded excesses led the poor and uneducated sect on to lose faith in the British rule[2]

But none of these developments could lead to revolutionary ideology unaided by other factors A wave of influence directly leading to violent temper of nationalism came from Maharashtra On 20 February 1879 a Chitpavan Brahman named Vasudeo Balvant Phadke broke the established order of political behaviour by leading a violent uprising He and his young associates raided a number of villages in Maharashtra On 21 July 1879 he was captured and subsequently sentenced to transportation for life On 12 January 1880 he escaped from the prison at Aden and was rearrested on the same day On 17 February 1883 he died in Jail Phadke was the morning star of revolutionary movement in India With his tiny organization he challenged the imperialist authority in a manner typical for a revolutionary secret society There is a wide gap of little less than two deca

des after Phadke But the dormant spirit was awakened by the English officials who were charged with the duty of eradicating the epidemic of the plague in Bombay Some of them overstepped the limit of the Indian idea of decency in their house to house search for patients infected with plague and the rats causing the disease It coincided with the time when the militant fervour in Maharashtra started to flow in the nationalist channel The Ganapati and Shivaji festivals were being celebrated as expressions of a new political mood One of the organizational components of nationalist activities was the Chapekar Club of Poona A regular secret society it decided to take revenge on the officials who showed ruthless stupidity in the name of preventing plague In 1897 in consequence Colonel Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst were murdered It led to the arrest trial and execution of two brothers Narayan Hari and Damodar Hari Chapekar Balgangadhar Tilak was sentenced to penal servitude for eighteen months for his comment in the *Kesari* that the murder was caused by arrogant officials who showed scant regard for the sanctity of the Indian houses

The incidents sensational by themselves were not followed with immediate repercussion in Bengal It took time and efforts to mature Sakharam Ganesh Deoskar and Aurobindo Ghosh were instrumental for introducing the influence of Maharashtra in Bengal Deoskar was largely responsible for resurrecting the image of Shivaji in Bengal As early as in 1894 when he was a teacher at Deoghar he inspired a batch of young students into militant nationalism He founded there a club for physical culture lathiplay and occasionally arranged mock fights of contending parties who posed as the Mughals and the Marathas The firebrand Barindra Kumar Ghosh then a sickly lad of fourteen was one of the pupils of Deoskar [3] Deoskar was a violent critic of the British rule and strongly convinced of the greatness of India's past His club was not a political secret society But his contributions to militant nationalism in Bengal constituted an unmistakable emotional force

Aurobindo Ghosh debarred from being an I C S officer for his inability to ride cast his lot at Baroda where he was the Vice Principal at the Gaikwad's College He came [4] it is said under the influence of a mysterious Thakur Saheb and a Yogi named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele He was put in touch with the new

nationalist developments in Maharashtra[10] His European education was also responsible for making him a seeker of complete freedom As early as in 1893-94, he wrote in a series of articles in the *Induprakash* that the Indian National Congress was an institution of the rich and socially privileged few and was hardly a national' body in any sense[11] This article which marked, the definite beginning of a new political tendency did not lead to immediate growth of secret societies It took him a complete decade of lonely contemplation to work out a model of secret society

About the year 1880 the educated middle class Hindu was subjected to a powerful pressure that added to his growing disaffection against the British rule He was troubled by a general deterioration of the economic condition An unprecedented rise of population tended to lessen his income from land His misery became graver by shrinkage of job opportunities The University of Calcutta was turning out more matriculates and graduates than that could be absorbed by Government and other employing agencies The spread of Western education in the other provinces further narrowed his field for employment[12] The Viceroy Ripon in 1883 noticed that Bengali was somewhat unpopular in northern western and southern India[13] All these compelled the educated Bengali to have the legal profession as his most important means of livelihood This profession also became overcrowded in no time Slowly his energy got bottled up As the pressure on him was mounting up he came to be informed by Romesh Chandra Dutt Dadabhai Naoroji William Digby and Sakharam Ganesh Deoskar that his distress was caused by the British rule[14]

The general economic deterioration was furthered by occasions of sporadic scarcities In 1887-90, a famine took a toll of 60 000 lives in the district of Dacca alone The catastrophe was followed by a flood which compelled the villagers to leave their huts and live in rafts and bamboo platforms In 1906, prices of commodities rose in the whole of Eastern Bengal 'On Sunday, August 12th rice was selling at Dacca at Rs 5 8 per maund five days latter the normal rate was Rs 8 and as much as Rs 10 were paid'[15]

This condition of economic distress unmistakably leads one

to question the ways of the rulers as administrative lapses largely added to the plight of the people It was one of the major issues on which the British rule in India was often criticised since the close of the nineteenth century The idea that India was being drained of resources with the consequent deepening of the poverty of the people unmistakably added to the development of nationalism It is difficult, however, to hold that this awareness of distress prompted revolutionary activities The history of the early secret societies shows that a large number of its members joined them during their schooldays before they experienced frustration The ideological foundation and moral background of the revolutionary movement did not show any inkling of frustration Inspite of all shortfalls it was a positive political growth which sounded a progressive note in a situation of doubt It was more an effect of hope than frustration that made political violence a reality in Bengal

The socio economic conditions of the nineteenth century Bengal, although constituted a suitable background for political unrest, did not induce any urgency for revolutionary violence Hem Chandra Kanungo reports that when the *Ananda Math* was staged in 1902 it did not cause any stir[16] But about the same time certain conditions led to the development of the *samitis* which were later transformed into secret societies Facts falsehoods rumours, fiction and emotional tension led to realisation of an appropriate setting for the revolutionary movement[17]

A number of important persons including Pramatha Nath Mitra Jogendra Vidyabhusan Rajnaram Basu Surendra Nath Tagore Sister Nivedita and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani were among those who believed that secret societies were the panacea of all evils that India suffered from The belief was sharpened by the British discomfiture in the Boer War (1902) Curzon's castigation of the educated Indians (1904) Russo Japanese War (1904) and the British decision to partition Bengal The Boers were considered savage peasants who challenged the British Military might with effectiveness The Russo-Japanese War showed that an oriental power could defeat a European power The partition of Bengal caused a historic stir It is doubtful if the secret societies could continue without the accidental impetus of the Russo-Japanese War and the challenge of the partition of Bengal The partition which created in July 1905 the pro

vinces of Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam hurt the Hindu *bhadralok* materially and emotionally

In 1905 a rumour was spread it was subsequently established by none other than Aurobindo Ghosh that the whole of India was ready for a revolt It also stated that the future Emperor of India was born in a Rajput princely family and an armed revolt was going to take place in 1906 Bengal was lagging behind The cowardice and idleness of the Bengali were likely to deprive him from his greatest moment of history This fiction worked in a magic rapidity among a credulous section of the Bengali youth [9] The attitude to believe the incredible is one of the mental conditions that makes a revolutionary Less important to this was the presence in Calcutta of Okakura a Japanese, who was believed to represent the 'Blackdragon Society

It is generally claimed that the large volume of poems, fiction, patriotic articles, songs and dramatic performances led to the growth of the revolutionary movements in Bengal But it is difficult to discern among this corpus of writings particular ones that were relevant for any study on the movement These writings were reflex of a historical development leading to nationalism of any variety including the revolutionary one In fact the forces that led to the development of the revolutionary movement in Bengal were commonplace nationalist tendencies They created other forms of political behaviour besides the revolutionary violence Only shortfall of such forms made political violence possible The early secret societies failed to make adjustment with the moderate belief in slow development towards self-government and extremist indefiniteness about their ultimate political end With the Surat split (1907) deportation of Lala *Lajpat Rai (1907) and Tilak (1908) the Press Act (1908) and the* new Arms Act (1910), the public politics seemed dead This was *a time 'of repression and public demoralization to quote an old* revolutionary leader which precluded all other forms of politics except the revolutionary violence Once born this desperate force refused to die easily

NOTES

1 Blair B Cling, *The Blue Mutiny*, 28

2 Hem Chandra Kanungo *Bange Utpla Prachesta*, 26 7

3 Minute by R H Craddock, dated 4 Jan 1913, Home Poll A, 4 May 1913 nos 9 13

4 L S S O Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers—Faridpur*, 55

5 J H Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society, Twentieth Century Bengal*, 5

6 Note by R H Craddock 27 Apr 1913, Home Poll A progs May 1913, Nos 72 75

7 L S S O'Malley *op cit* 55

8 Note by R H Craddock 27 Apr 1913, *op cit*

9 L S S O'Malley *op cit* 55

10 Note by R H Craddock, 27 Apr 1913, *op cit*

11 Pradip Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal* 31-57

12 B C Allen, *Eastern Bengal Gazetteers*—Dacca 161

13 Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar Derozio and Young Bengal, *Studies in Bengal Renaissance* (edited by A C Gupta), 30 31

14 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *Hanumanbabu Sambad, Lok Rahasya*, 63-71

15 Swami Nikhilananda (ed) *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 28, 29

16 *Swami Vivekananda Bani O Rachana* I 23, 249

17 Sibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj*, 252-54

18 Jamini Mohan Ghosh *Samaj and Faki Raders in Bengal*, 108 09

19 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *Bangadesher Krishak, Vigyan Rahasya*, 218 20

20 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *Banglar Kalanka, Bibidha Prabandha*, II, 293 94 (Translated from Bengali by the author of this paper)

21 *Ibid* 294

22 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *Bangalir Itihas Samande Kayekti Katha, Bibidha Prabandha*, II, 299

23 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *ibid*, 300 01

24 Amles Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, 3 19

25 Report of Sedition Committee, Ch II, para 24

26 Bhupendra Nath Datta *Swami Vivekananda, Patriot Prophet*, 212

27 Swami Vivekananda *op cit* 248 49

28 *Ibid* 34

29 *Ibid* (*Vartaman Bharat*) 247

30 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay *Lok Rahasya* 257 (*Balu*) 637 (*Hanumanbabu Sambad*)

31 Jogesh Chandra Bagal *Muktir Sandhane Bharat*

32 Barindra Kumar Ghosh *Amar Atmakatha* 102

33 Jogesh Chandra Bagal *op cit*

34 W S Blunt *India Under Ripon* 269

35 *Chha Kar Darpan* a drama describing the plight of the tea garden workers was prescribed in 1876 as the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal felt it would be bad and unwise to permit the British name to be publicly vilified Note dated 13 June 1876, Home Public A Aug 1876 Nos 97 112

36 Jogesh Chandra Bagal *Hindumelar Itibritta* 2, 3 38 41

37 Hem Chandra Kanungo *op cit* 12

38 T R Deogirikar *Wasudeo Balwant Phadke The Story of Indian Revolution* (ed A C Guha) 40 60

39 Barindra Kumar Ghosh *Amar Atmakatha* 90

40 Barindra Kumar Ghosh *Agnijug* 1

41 Sri Aurobindo *Early Political Writings* Vol I 1 56

42 J H Broomfield *op cit* 32 33

43 Minute 26 July 1883 Home Pub A Progs Oct 1883 Nos 86 93

44 R C Dutta *Economic History of India* Vol I & II William Digby *Prosperous British India* Dadabhai Naoroji *Poverty and Un British Rule in India* and Sakharam Ganesh Deoskar, *Deshar Katha*

45 B C Allen *op cit* 55 128 129

46 Hem Chandra Kanungo *op cit* 1

47 *Ibid* 13

48 Bhupendra Nath Dutt *op cit* 8 9

THE "SILK LETTER' PLOT

YUVARAJ DEVA PRASAD

The outbreak of World War I gave a new fillip to the revolutionary movement against British rule in India The Silk Letter" Plot planned right during the middle of the war represents a major organised attempt by the Indian Muslims to hit the government with the help of some foreign powers at a time when the latter's resources were sorely stretched

The 'Silk Letter" Plot of 1915-16 was a revolutionary project Mahmudul Hasan and Ubeidullah Sindhi were the guiding spirits behind it Mahmudul Hasan (1851-1920), whose religious and political feelings had been greatly upset by the incident of the Kanpur Mosque and by the Balkan war, was the aged and respected Head Maulvi of the Deoband Madarsa Ubeidullah Sindhi (1872 1944), who was born of a Sikh parentage but was converted to Islam and educated at Deoband was Mahmudul Hasan s very close and distinguished pupil After graduation he spent 12 years in Sind where he became an influential person and founded several Muslim schools In 1908, he was called back to Deoband and became a professor In 1909 he founded the Jamiatul Ansar or the Deoband Old Boys' Association He also created a secret Jamiat within the Association a sort of inner circle where the foundation for the Silk Letter Plot was presumably laid [1]

Those who organised the plot were to form a Janudal Rabbania (Junudullah) or the Army of God whose object was to bring about a union of Muslim Kings for the purpose of liberating Muslim countries from the infidel rule particularly in India [2] Mahmudul Hasan was to get into touch with the Ottoman government through the Turkish governor of the Hejaz The Turkish government was to be persuaded to fulfil certain conditions after which the Afghan government was to declare war on the British In Kabul the officers of the "Army of God" were to work in cooperation with other anti-British elements

The formation of the "Provisional Government of India" on

December 1, 1915' was a landmark in the activities of the organisers of this anti British scheme Mahendra Pratap, brother of Raja Dat Prasad Singh of Mursan in U P, and brother-in-law of Raja Ranbir Singh of Jhind in Punjab who was of a rather eccentric character but a known extremist in politics,[8] became its 'life president" or president till a regular government was established in India by the Indian National Congress He had left India in December 1914 and had subsequently joined the Indian Society" at Berlin He had been sent with the Turko-German Mission to Afghanistan in 1915 bearing *jehad fatwas* and letters from the Kaiser and the Sultan of Turkey to the Amir of Afghanistan and the ruling princes in India Barkatullah who had accompanied the Turko German Mission with Mahendra Pratap was to become the 'Prime Minister' of the provisional government He had come into prominence on account of his anti British propaganda in Tokyo where he was a teacher of Urdu in the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages He had become a member of the Indian National Party at Berlin after his dismissal by the Japanese Government in 1914.[9] Ubeidullah was himself to be the Minister for India".

Besides establishing a provisional government of India composed of several associates of the *Ghadr* movement[9a] Ubeidullah also organised a branch of the Indian National Congress with himself as its president.[10] It is interesting to note from Ubeidullah's published diary that the Amir had himself advised him to seek contacts and work in collaboration with the Indian National Congress The Congress Committee that came into existence in Kabul was the first of its kind outside the British empire and Ubeidullah had felt elated on becoming its president.[11]

Another significant aspect of this anti British plot was the active involvement in it of some of the prominent Indian pan Islamists, namely Abul Kalam Azad Hakeem Abdur Razaaq Ansari Dr Ansari, Hasrat Mohani and others Those working against the British in India were not only to raise funds to finance the plot at Kabul, the Hejaz and India, but were simultaneously to encourage Indian Muslims to rise in open revolt at the outbreak of the war between Afghanistan and India.[12]

Thus, Ubeidullah's scheme was to combine in his plot the organisational machinery of the Wahabi' movement, the Islamic fer-

vour of the Maulvis, and the political energy and bitterness of the non Islamists His project to work side by side and in unity with the Provisional Government of India' was intended to keep on his side the revolutionary elements among the Hindus Michael O Dwyer, the Governor of the Punjab wrote about the plot

> It was designed to unite all the forces of Islam, the Turks, the Arabs under the Sherif of Mecca the Afghans, the Frontier tribes, and the Mohammedans of India in a combined effort against British rule This was to take the form of an attack by the Hindustani Fanatics, a matter easy enough to manage and which in this case did come off—supported by a general Mohammedan rising in India It was hoped that the revolutionary Hindus and the America-returned Sikhs would at once join in "[14]

Ubeidullah's idea was to use the Madarsa as the headquarters for his anti British movement and to propagate pan Islamism throughout India with the help of the hundreds of *maulvis* who passed out of this Madarsa every year and served in different parts of India The management of Deoband, however, were anxious not to give the Government any pretext for destroying the institution, therefore they removed him from professorship in 1913 Undaunted, Ubeidullah went to Delhi and started a school in November 1913 for training the radicals—Nazarat-ul-Ma'arif-ul-Qorania[15] The institution was established to popularise Islamic teachings among the Muslim Youth coming under the influence of British Indian secular education Here also he was able to write two pamphlets stressing the importance of world Muslim solidarity In these he also advocated a plan of action to the effect that there should be an invasion of the subcontinent from outside followed by a rebellion against the British inside[16]

Ubeidullah's expulsion from Deoband in 1913, however, did not mean snapping of his connection with that place He continued to go to Deoband and Mahmudul Hasan's house continued to be the meeting place of anti-British elements When World War I broke out Ubeidullah began to travel about the country He made his way to Sind, where he visited his friends and fellow pan Islamists[17] He had been working in close cooperation with Mahmudul Hasan and soon after Turkey entered the war Mahmudul Hasan and Ubeidullah had interviews with the emissaries of the

Wahabi from the Colony of the Hindustani Fanatics across the North West Frontier He discussed the disturbances that were being worked up across the frontier against the British along with the two representatives of the Mujahideen who came thrice between November 1914 and February 1915 for the purpose [18] Not satisfied with the progress made so far, Mahmudul Hasan sent in June 1915 four of his trusted lieutenants to arouse the frontier tribes These efforts produced considerable activity across the border during 1915 Many of the tribes took part in fighting against the British [19]

Mahmudul Hasan, however, believed that the work could best be carried out by going to some Muslim country and, therefore, decided to go to Hejaz and asked Ubeidullah to go to Afghanistan which had become a centre of German, Turkish and Indian rebel activities [20]

Mahmudul Hasan s first idea was to go over the frontier But he refrained from doing so because it would have been quickly known to the British authorities and would have brought the Deoband Madarsa into undesirable suspicion He considered Madina a more suitable place from where he could direct a Muslim plot That is why he decided to go to the Hejaz ignoring Abul Kalam Azad s advice, who wished him to stay in India and provoke the British government to take action against him and, thus arouse the indignation of the people On reaching the Hejaz, he was to direct a campaign of Jehad against the British government In this matter he was to seek assistance from the local Turkish officials there, and also to go to Constantinople or Kabul The idea was to induce the Turks either to send an army against India, or to help the Amir of Afghanistan in attacking India [21]

Ubeidullah himself went to Kabul with some of his associates to incite the Amir and the frontier tribes against the British In Kabul he was given a secret audience by the Amir, Habibullah Khan [22] He was advised to work in collaboration with the other nationalist leaders in India

Ubeidullah is best remembered in the revolutionary annals as one of the two authors of the famous ' Silk letters ' [23] It was deemed necessary that the fellow members of the anti British plot in India and Arabia be given an account of the scheme which Ubeidullah had worked out in concert with the Turko German Mission

at Kabul Thus Ubeidullah came to write the wellknown Silk letters which were to be transmitted to Mahmudul Hasan in the Hejaz via India The letters described the Muslim plots in Kabul and India, the arrival of the German and Turkish mission the formation of provisional government and the plan for the formation of an 'Army of God to drive out the British through an alliance of all Islamic rulers'

The letters were penned on three bits of yellow silk The first letter measuring 6 × 5 was to Sheikh Abdul Rahim The second letter which measured 10 × 8 was addressed to Hazrat Maulana Sahib who was evidently Mahmudul Hasan The third letter which was a continuation of the second measured 15 × 10 The first and the third letters were signed by Ubeidullah Significantly the date given on the Silk Letter is 8 Ramzan corresponding July 9 1916 It is obvious therefore that the news of the Arab revolt was not known in Kabul until then although it was published in India on June 23, 1916.[5]

The main letter addressed to Hazrat Maulana was to be sent by a reliable pilgrim to Madina but on the way it was to be shown to people involved in anti British activities in India Sheikh Abdul Rahim was to undertake the forwarding of the letter to Madina As such a short covering letter was sent to him It mentioned the following points

> (1) the letter was to be sent to Hazrat Maulana at Madina, (2) Hazrat Maulana was to be warned both verbally and by the letter that he was not to try to come to Kabul (3) Hazrat Maulana should understand that Maulvi Mansur alias Mohammad Mian might not be able to go to the Haj that year (4) Sheikh Abdul Rahim was to try to go to Kabul to meet Ubeidullah, (5) Sheikh Abdul Rahim was told that if necessary, he might get assistance from Hamdullah of Panipat in forwarding the letter to Madina Sheikh Abdul Rahim was also instructed to send the answer from the latter either direct to Kabul or through Ahmad Lahori alias Ahamad Chakwali.[6]

The second letter addressed to Hazrat Maulana began with a discussion of what happened to Ubeidullah after he had disappeared from India in August 1915 After surveying the position

in India, Ubeidullah briefly described the situation in Yaghistan i.e. tribal territory in North West Frontier. He then gave a lucid account of the state of affairs in Afghanistan where he had arrived in February-March 1916. Finally, Ubeidullah elaborated his anti-British scheme envisaging the 'Army of God" and the "Provisional Government of India".[1]

The headquarters of the 'Army of God" was to be at Madina with branches at Constantinople, Tehran and Kabul. Mahmudul Hasan was appointed 'Al Qaid or General" at Madina. Ubeidullah was to become the 'Officiating General' at Kabul.[2]

The list of names of office-holders of this Muslim Salvation Army started with the big figureheads of the Muslim world who were expediently to be included in any big pan Islamic scheme. Significantly the list included the Grand Sharif of Makka (Mecca) as a Field Marshal.

The officers of the 'Army of God' fell clearly into four groups (i) Ubeidullah's fanatical friends, followers and relatives in Sind and their connections in other parts of India (ii) the Deoband United Provinces and Delhi group of Maulvis, whom Ubeidullah had brought under his influence while he was a professor at Deoband Madarsa, and through his associations the Jamiat ul-Ansar and the Nazarat ul-Ma'arifat ul Qoraina (iii) the Wahabi fund collectors of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and North Western Frontier Province, and (iv) the wellknown pan Islamiat leaders.[3] Among the muhajir students of Lahore one was to be a Major General, one Colonel and six were to be Lieutenant Colonels.

High up in the list of the Muslim Salvation Army were three persons from Bihar holding the rank of Lieutenant Generals. They were Abdul Aziz of Rahimabad, Darbhanga, Abdullah of Ghazipur and Abdur Rahim of Azimabad Patna City.[4] Abdul Aziz was a wellknown Wahabi *maulvi* who travelled widely in Northern India for attending Wahabi meetings. Hafiz Abdullah was a teacher in the Ahmadia Madarsa at Shahabad. In 1907 he became the head maulvi and secretary of the Arrah Madarsa which was the parent institution of all the Wahabi schools in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Abdur Rahim probably belonged to the family of Ahmadullah the Wahabi leader of Patna who was convicted and given life sentence in the Wahabi trials of 1865. He was one of those to whom Mahmudul Hasan wrote for advice be-

fore quitting India for Arabia He supported Mahmudul Hasan in his determination to proceed to Arabia

The Silk Letters were entrusted to Sheikh Abdul Haq alias Jiwan Das, son of Lorinda Ram of village Varoha P O Junjiyal, District Shahpur, by Sheikh Ibrahim for delivery in Sind to Abdul Rahim He had previously been the private tutor to Shah Nawaz and Allah Nawaz the two sons of Khan Bahadur Rup Nawaz of Multan [1] Abdul Haq went to see Rup Nawaz Khan on his way to Sind Rup Nawaz Khan played tricks with Abdul Haq who was induced to show him the Silk Letters Rup Nawaz Khan snatched the letters and put them and Abdul Haq at once before the Commissioner of the Multan Division [2] The Commissioner of Multan had some portions of the letters read to him and thought them "childish rot", but transmitted them for information to the Punjab Secretariat from where they were sent to the Punjab Criminal Investigation Department In the meantime Abdul Haq changed his mind and decided to betray his friends He made a detailed statement and turned a government approver for which he was later recruited into the government police This was followed by certain searches and arrests of some of those connected with the plot Ahmad Ali Abdulla Abu Muhammad Ahmadalias Ahmad Chakwali promptly made statements to the Punjab police confessing their implication and disclosing further details of the plot [3] Abdul Haq and seven others including Abul Kalam Azad had their movements restricted under the Defence of India Act—chiefly in the Punjab, while six men who had assisted in the propaganda outside India and had returned were interned under the Ingress into India Ordinance in the North West Frontier Province United Provinces the Punjab and Sind Three of the members of the plot, Abdul Bari Shujaulian and Shah Nawaz Khan made confessions and were pardoned [4] Mahmudul Hasan and his party in the Hejaz had not reckoned on the revolt of the Sharif of Makka which upset their plans In December 1916 Mahmudul Hasan and his party of three (Husain Ahmad Madani Auzer Gul, Abdul Wahid) along with two others were arrested at Jeddah by the Sharif on the ground that they were plotting against his government They were deported to Malta [5].

Although Ubeidullah's plot remained on paper, the stage on which he was performing and where he hoped to develop his

drama had in the background a great number of Muslims scattered over a vast area whose religious and political feelings were anti British and pan Islamic This area had a long history of active struggle against the British under the Wahabi leadership [3] At the same time Ubeidullah wanted to broaden the base of his activities by seeking cooperation of Indian revolutionaries like Mahendra Pratap and also seeking contacts with the Indian National Congress

Apart from organisational weaknesses and immaturity one of the main drawbacks of Ubeidullah's plot was that it depended very much on foreign assistance and interference, mainly from Turkey and Afghanistan This, however did not materialise

Ubeidullah's active or inactive sympathisers in India could have done very little besides underground space work until a big powerful movement began across the North Western border or in the Near East [3] The tribes were broken up by internal dissensions and wanted capable leaders Afghanistan had a cautious ruler and an inefficient military organisation His attachment with the movement was also not very firm It appears from Mahmudul Hasan's diary that many of the conversations between the Amir and the organisers of the plot were reported almost verbatim to the British Ambassador at Kabul The Turkish and German forces were far off and busy with their own immediate problems Nevertheless Ubeidullah's attitude seemed largely a judicious mixture of mutiny riot and old fashioned hill fighting but he had to grapple with a vast complex situation He tried to mould the Turks and Germans to his scheme by using Mahmudul Hasan as a diplomat through whom the Turks and the Germans might be persuaded to hasten the despatch of officers arms ammunitions etc to far distant Afghanistan He stirred up the old Haji of Tarangzai to light the match which was to put the frontier in a blaze He persuaded many students to take the first step towards jehad by leaving India for a ruly Muslim country and there he used them as what he called "the moving limbs of his body" [3] In Kabul itself he was able to fan the flame of Sardar Nasrulla's hatred for the British But the time was not yet ripe for the grand drama that he planned to stage It was only a few individuals and not yet the community that wanted to throw off the foreign yoke And when some individuals failed the whole plan flopped

NOTES

1 Report on the Silk Letter Case by C E W Sands, Assistant to Deputy Inspector General Central Intelligence Department, U P, Part, I, p 7, India Office Library (London), Political Department, Political and Secret Files, Vol 10/633 No 4260/1916 (hereafter in accordance with the India Office System L/P & S/10 633, 4260/1916)

2 Note on the Silk Letter Case by V Vivian, Assistant Director, Criminal Intelligence Government of India December 7, 1916 Foreign Department Frontier Branch, Confidential Proceedings, 1918, Nos 241-430, p 3

3 Mahendra Pratap (Raja) *My Life Story of Fifty Five Years (December 1886 to December 1941)* Dehra Dun (1947), p 51

4 James Campbell Ker *Political Trouble in India 1907-1917*, Calcutta (1973) p 244

5 Pratap, p 51

6 Sands' Report, Part II (Who is who in the Silk Letter Case), p 29

7 Government of India Home Department Political A January 1913 No 5

8 Sands Report, Part II p 29

9 The founder and organiser of this movement was Hardayal, a brilliant product of the Punjab University who had gone abroad in 1905 He organised the Indian students in the U S A and started, a newspaper, *Ghadr* in 1913 It was a "revolutionary conspiracy of all communities' with its branches in U S A Philippines, Malaya Singapore, Hongkong Egypt Turkey Afghanistan and Germany During the First World War it stirred a vain hope in India particularly in the Punjab that Germany's imminent attack on British, if it coincided with a general uprising in India would give a golden opportunity to Indians to free themselves from the foreign yoke Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah were prominent leaders of this movement

10 Ziyaul Hasan Faruqi *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* Bombay (1963) p 59

11 See Hussain Ahmed Madani *Naqsh-i Hayat* (Urdu) 2 vols, Delhi, 1953 and notes and extracts from Ubaidullah Sindhi's diary *Zafr Diary* (Urdu) Lahore 1946

12 Vivian's note p 3

13 The Wahabis were a puritan sect, founded in Nejd in Arabia, early in the eighteenth century They attempted to restore the primitive practices of Islam which they thought had become corrupted during its worldwide career of conquest The new doctrine was introduced into India by Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi The Wahabis believed that India under British rule had become a *Darul Harb* and it was the duty of the Muslims to migrate

outside the country In pursuance of this belief Sayyid Ahmed migrated in 1826 and founded an independent principality on the North West Frontier Wahabis accepted the six books of traditions collected by the Sunnis but rejected the glosses of the Church theologians and claim liberty of conscience and the right of private interpretation They insist on strict monotheism, which is endangered by the excessive reverence paid to the person of the prophet, to the Imams and Saints Hence they condemn pilgrimages to shrines From a political point of view the most striking doctrine of the sect was that as India was "the land of warfare" it was a religious duty to wage war against its rulers L/P & S/10/524/53/1915 part II (British Cabinet Memorandum on Indian Muslim) see Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement in India* Calcutta, 1966

14 Michael O'Dwyer *India as I knew It* London, (1924), p 178
15 Sands' Report, Part I p 7
16 *Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi Ulema in Politics, Karachi (1972), p* 245
17 Ker, p 283
18 Sands' Report Part I, pp 12 13
19 *Ibid*, Part II, pp 16-17
20 Qureshi p 246
21 Sands Report, Part I p 14
22 Qureshi, p 247
23 Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India* Oxford University Press, published under the auspices of the Social Sciences Research Centre University of Punjab, 1967, p 117
24 Michael O'Dwyer, p 179
25 Note on the Silk Letters by C R Cleveland, Director Criminal Intelligence September 14 1916
F D Frontier Branch, Confidential A Proceedings 1918, Nos, 241 430, p 16
26 *Ibid*
27 *Ibid*, p 17
28 Vivian's Note p 3
29 *Ibid*
30 Sands Report Part II, pp 1 4, 8
31 Statement on persons who were dealt with for their connection in the *Silk Letter* conspiracy, *H D*, Poll, A, *June 1919* Nos 517-25
32 Sands Report, Part I, p 23
33 *Ibid*
34 Meston Collection, MSS, EUR, F/36/15, p 8 (India Office Library, London)
35 *Ibid* p 7
36 See Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *op cit* chapter V
37 Cleveland's Note, p 18
38 *Ibid*

BHAGAT SINGH AND HSRA

BEJOY KUMAR SINHA

The revolutionaries believe that the deliverance of their country will come through Revolution The Revolution they are constantly working and hoping for will not only express itself in the form of an armed conflict between the foreign government and its supporters and the people it will also usher in a New Social Order The revolution will ring the death knell of Capitalism and class distinctions and privileges It will bring joy and prosperity to the starving millions who are seething today under the terrible yoke of both foreign and Indian exploitation It will bring the nation into its own It will give birth to a new State—a new social order Above all, it will establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and will for ever banish social parasites from the seat of political power Here in India as in other countries in the past Terrorism will develop into the Revolution and the Revolution into Independence—social political and economic

"We take this opportunity to appeal to our countrymen—to the youth to the workers and peasants to the revolutionary intelligentsia—to come forward and join us in carrying aloft the banner of freedom Let us establish a new order of society in which political and economic exploitation will be an impossibility Let cowards fall back and cringe for compromise and peace We ask not for mercy and we give no quarters Ours is a war to the end—to Victory or Death Long live the Revolution"

These are the words clear and ringing of the Manifesto of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association under the caption "The Philosophy of Bomb" that was distributed all over the country in the beginning of 1930 It had to be issued as Gandhiji with his doctrinaire faith in the efficacy of truth and non violence had through his writings in *Young India* and in his speeches open-

ed a sustained attack on the methods and ideas upheld by the revolutionaries

INSPIRED BY LIBERATION STRUGGLES

Since the birth of their movement in the closing years of the nineteenth century in Maharashtra since the period of Tilak and the martyrdom of the three Chapekar Brothers Indian Revolutionaries had been all along drawing strength and inspiration from the revolutionary movements and the national liberation struggles all over the world That is how it had broadened in its aims and methods during its different phases

Starting as a movement of pure militant nationalism for complete independence of the motherland, it stood for a democratic republic during the years of the First World War, relying on the strength of the revolting kisans and their brothers serving in the British army

The Ghadar Party that had about ten thousand members in India and abroad was mainly of peasants who had gone to America as emigrant labour or were spread in the countryside in Punjab In the words of the famous Rowlatt Committee the party had "for its object the freedom of India from the British Raj by mutiny whereby the English were to be driven out of India and the country governed by the people themselves" The revolutionaries failed in their immediate objective but they paid a heavy price About one hundred of them mounted the gallows fortyone faced the firing squad and about a hundred went to the Andamans sentenced to life transportation"

It was at this time that the Russian Revolution triumphed in October 1917 heralding a new social order for the first time in world history to champion the interest of the common men and women who till yesterday were the 'Disinherited of the Earth', mere labouring tools to be exploited for the few

The Indian revolutionaries received the news of this victory with unbounded joy and set themselves to the study of its ideas and workings as also establishing contacts with the leaders of the Soviet Union Baba Gurmukh Singh a veteran leader of the Ghadar Party recently wrote that when the Ghadar Party attempt failed "it made a heart searching and took stock of its strength and weakness and resolved to overcome them In the meantime

the October Socialist Revolution took place in Russia The party was naturally interested in learning from their successful revolt and sent many of its members to Russia to study and imbibe their experience"

In India the difficulty was paucity of literature on the Soviet Union Books that were available were a few and as for news mostly garbled versions used to appear in papers as supplied by Reuter—a British news agency In spite of it all in the twenties from what material was available the revolutionaries got substantial ideas about the fundamentals of scientific socialism and its successful application on the soil of the Soviet Union As I also had joined the ranks of revolutionaries during this period in Kanpur an industrial town I soon found myself in this new stream of thought and realised that our party known as Hindustan Republican Association working in U P Bihar, Punjab and other parts of Northern India was moving towards a socialist goal

One of our leaders was Sachindra Nath Sanyal who had been sent to the Andamans as a life term prisoner in 1915 and subsequently released in general amnesty at the conclusion of war when reforms were announced by the government He had contacts with M N Roy who was in Russia Sanyal declared the new ideas in the party manifesto "The Revolutionary that was distributed all over India on a single day in 1925

It stated

> 'The immediate object of the revolutionary party in the domain of politics is to establish a Federal Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution the basic principles of this Republic shall be universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make the exploitation of man by man possible The revolutionary party is not national but international in the sense that its ultimate object is to bring harmony in the world and in this respect it follows the footsteps of the great Indian Rishis of the glorious past and of Bolshevik Russia in modern age In the domain of economic and social welfare the party will foster the spirit of cooperation in as large a scale as possible instead of private and unorganised business enterprises'

Sanyal was arrested and sentenced again to transportation for life in the Kakori Conspiracy Case of 1925 Four of the accused

were hanged and my brother who had been attending the trial of the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case in 1924 got a sentence of ten years R I along with the other accused who were sentenced from five to twenty years imprisonment In this Kanpur case Nalini Gupta a revolutionary was one of the four accused in the dock Ramchandralal Sharma another revolutionary could not be produced in court as he had escaped to Pondicherry

It now fell on our shoulders the members of the second rank of the party to take up the reins of the party in our hands We were in close touch with each other spread in different centres all over the country as small groups In the very same centres were the groups of communists also and we had contact with them In Lahore there was Bhagat Singh who was associating with Majid Kedarnath Sahgal and Sohan Singh Josh who were all later convicted in the Meerut Conspiracy Case He was also working on the editorial staff of *Kirti* headed by Josh

In Kanpur Ajoy Kumar Ghosh who later became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India had joined the party We were class mates in school and college Shaukat Usmani after his release from jail following his conviction in the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case of 1924 had also arrived there to renew his work Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi Maulana Hasrat Mohani Radha Mohan Gokulji were all supporting the socialist cause through their writing and public activities They all knew us as revolutionaries and we had close association with them through open and secret work

Under the impact of the October Revolution there were rapid developments in the country Labour was coming into its own A number of dedicated communists were mobilising workers The powerful Girni Kamgar Union had been born in Bombay But the country in general had to be awakened for an assault on British imperialism In the words of Ajoy Ghosh as revolutionaries we felt that as for the most important question however the question in what manner the fight for freedom and socialism was to be waged armed action by individuals and groups was to remain our immediate task Nothing else we held could smash constitutionalist illusions nothing else could free the country from the grip in which fear held it When the stagnant calm was broken by a series of hammer blows delivered by us at selected points and on suitable occasions against the most hated

officials of the Government and mass movement was unleashed we would link ourselves with that movement, act as its armed detachment and give it a Socialist direction And we looked upon ourselves as men who by their example would create the basis for the rise of a new leadership—Socialism for us was an idea the principle to guide us to rebuild society after the capture of power

SOCIALISM WAS ACCEPTED AS GOAL

It was at this time that Shaukat Usmani who was leaving for the Comintern meeting requested me at Kanpur to go along with him with some other comrades as representatives of the revolutionary party to seek Moscow's aid for our programme I consulted Bhagat Singh and we felt that it was not the opportune time We should follow Usmani later after our party had arranged some militant actions that we had in view

Our party's name we now changed to Hindustan Socialist Republican Association to declare our faith in socialism as our cause In our central committee we also decided to propagate our socialist ideas from the scaffold and the forum of trials in which party men may get involved We were convinced that it would prove effective to carry the message of revolutionary socialism to the mass of our people to their minds and hearts in a speedy process We also started Naujawan Bharat Sabha as our open platform

It was in furtherance of this policy that bombs were thrown in the Central Assembly in April 1929 and a few months earlier the British police officer was killed in Lahore who was responsible for Lala Lajpat Rai's death

In the latter case a HSRA leaflet posted in Lahore streets announced The murder of a leader respected by millions of people at the unworthy hands of an ordinary police official like J P Saunders was an insult to the nation It was the bounden duty of young men of India to efface it Our objective is to work for a revolution which would end exploitation of man by man

Declaring our new faith Bhagat Singh in this last letter as his testiment smuggled out of jail a few days before his hanging affirmed Let us declare that the state of war does exist and shall exist so long as the Indian toiling masses and their natural

resources are being exploited by a handful of exploiters They may be purely British capitalist or mixed British and Indian or even purely Indian It shall be waged for ever with new vigour, greater audacity and unflinching determination till the socialist republic is established"

Earlier when bombs were thrown in the Assembly in April 1929 in protest against Trades Disputes Bill and Public Safety Bill, both antilabour measures, HSRA pamphlets were also dropped It declared 'it is easy to kill individuals but you cannot kill ideas Bourbons and Czars fell while revolutions marched triumphantly ahead" In course of the trial that ensued Bhagat Singh raised the slogan of Long Live Revolution The Government banned it but the nation defiantly took it up as the new battle cry expressing its urges and aspirations

In the Lahore Conspiracy Case some of us—the accused, gave a statement refusing to recognise the court and saying that "we feel that unless the whole social order is changed and socialistic society is established the whole world is in danger of a disastrous catastrophe"

In the course of our trial we observed Lenin Day on January 27 defying the courts we put on red scarfs, gave slogans 'Long Live Socialist Revolution', 'Long Live Communist International", 'Long Live Lenin Down with Imperialism A cable for transmission was then handed over to court It ran "On occasion of Lenin Day we express our hearty congratulations on triumphant and onward march of Comrade Lenin's success for the great experiment carried out in Soviet Russia We wish to associate ourselves with world revolutionary movement "Victory to Workers Regime", "Woe to Capitalism", "Down with Imperialism'

These proceedings of the celebration were featured in the *Tribune* and other newspapers The Naujawan Bharat Sabha was carrying on socialist propaganda all the time on similar lines The HSRA in another manifesto distributed in Lahore Congress gave a warning "The leaning of certain politicians in favour of Dominion Status shows clearly which way the wind blows Indian capital is preparing to betray the masses into the hands of Foreign Capitalism and receive as a price of this betrayal a little share in the government of the country' For his sacrifice and daring and above all his socialist thoughts expressing the dreams and

hopes of the people, Bhagat Singh became the beloved son of the entire nation Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the official historian of the Congress wrote in 1931 that it is no exaggeration to say that at that moment Bhagat Singh s name was as widely known all over India and was as popular as Gandhi s `

Other HSRA members Rajguru and Sukhdeo mounted the gallows in Lahore jail along with Bhagat Singh Chandra Sekhar Azad died fighting a pitched battle with the police in Allahabad Bhagawati Charan Vohra writer of *Philosophy of Bomb,* became a martyr on the banks of Ravi testing bombs for the escape of Bhagat Singh Jatin Das passed away in an epic group hunger strike at Lahore and Thakur Mahabir Singh defying the authorities in distant Andamans, breathed his last in a mass hunger strike They were all crusaders for the socialist cause Through their chosen death they all delivered the messag· of Socialism—of a new life of genuine Equality, Freedom and Happiness to the teeming millions of their dear and vast motherland

THE SEETHARAMA RAJU FITURI

G J RAMA RAO

People speaking the Telugu language shot into prominence in recent times with the heroic Telangana armed uprising against the Nizam of Hyderabad and his supporters and underlings Nevertheless the people now inhabiting Andhra Pradesh known as Andhras have had a rich tradition of armed movements against oppression

Sometimes these movements looked backwards to a supposed golden age in the reign of some king Under British rule more often the movements were directed against the white man and his lackeys Until Gandhiji came on the scene and made a fetish of non violence no one among the Andhras no one perhaps in India ever thought of a fight against oppression in terms of non violence and passive resistance If petition and persuasion failed arms were taken up as a quite natural corollary In this way the masses practised both non violence and violence each in its own good time without reducing either into a dogma or an incantation Non violence was not Gandhiji s contribution but a fetish of it as against the sober non dogmatic practice of the people or the masses This important fact is to be grasped while evaluating the armed movement that Alluri Seetharama Raju built and led in the early 1920s

Seetharama Raju belonged to the Alluri Kshatriya family His father was a photographer and the family was not rich They lived in Rajahmundry on the banks of the Godavari The town had distinguished itself in the last century by a radical reform movement under the leadership of Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu The initial inspiration to this movement may have come from the Brahmo Samaj but it acquired specific features of its own and went beyond the aspirations of the Brahmo Samaj Rajahmundry seethed with reform radicalism and literary and intellectual ferment and soon it was caught up in the maelstrom of nationalist fer

Your Values and traditions were questioned new values pro pounded and propagated new social practices initiated and new ideas heatedly discussed and put into practice The chains of sub jection to an orthodox traditional past were being smashed And the chains of subjection to the British were also to be smashed

Such was the atmosphere in Rajahmundry when Seetharama Raju was born He was born in 1897(?) the eldest of three His father taught him the rudiments of nationalism as it were when he struck the boy s raised arm that greeted an Englishman pass ing by But the father died and the mother had to bring up the three children two sons and a daughter with no resources to fall back upon

The mother sought her brother in law s (husband s brother) help He was a government employee and did his best to help out the brother s family He took keen interest in the education of the children with the result that when Seetharama Raju failed in his Third Form (equivalent of Eighth Standard) he was given a thrashing

Thrashing or no thrashing Seetharama Raju did not take to the bookish knowledge imparted at school He was game for more active and practical things such as sports body building horse riding and the stage He even played female roles and once he was given a medal for his good performance with George V embossed on it He often used to wear the medal and would say See isn t the Englishman sitting tight on the country s chest? This medal is a constant reminder of the ugly fact

One does not know the reason why yoga and astrology attract ed the young Seetharama Raju He became a devotee of goddess Kali also Such things as these are probably common to all those whom Eric Hobsbawm calls primitive rebels in his book with that title Taking money from his mother on the pretext of get ting a job Seetharama Raju went to Banaras and the Himalayas and wandered through Bastar to Nasik What prompted him to make these journeys is not known His own inclination was to renounce this world and be a Sanyasi But before that he want ed to provide for his mother and brother Coming back to Dharakonda he acquired some land and built a village called Sriram Vijayanagar He became a highly respected person People from more than forty villages around helped him in the

work His impressive appearance, regular meditation, his knowledge of omens and their interpretation, his knowledge of herbs as cures for diseases and his ability to cast horoscopes and foretell the future—all these not only endeared him to the villagers around but also made him a kind of god man in their eyes He would tell them stories from the epics and inspire them to ideals

All this kind of life did not indicate any violent activity much less an uprising in the area But the surprising thing was that there *was* an uprising and it was led by Seetharama Raju of all people It is a rich illustration of the fact that circumstances make men just as men make circumstances In the process leadership arises in unexpected people and unlikely individuals rise to the level of heroes

The area in which the uprising began and spread was declared an Agency Here tribal people lived satisfying most of their needs from the forests They were simple hardworking easeloving and above all freedom loving They did not dominate others and they did not like to be dominated by others The British rulers however interfered with their way of life in order to extract profit out of them The tahsildar Bastion was cruel and corrupt He was bent on subjugating them by breaking their spirit The contractors were even more corrupt The petty government officials the money lenders the contractors and the petty traders all joined in the game of cheating the hill people, rendering them bonded debt slaves expropriating the fruits of their labour and making them work ever harder to satisfy their exacting demands In this unwholesome business even some of the chiefs of the hill people, known as Muthadars joined hands to profit by the general oppression of their people and to escape such oppression themselves Naturally Seetharama Raju was outraged at the injustice, corruption and oppression practised by the British rulers with Indians as their cogs and agents He was determined to put an end to this state of affairs He realised that in order to do so the country would have to get rid of British rule How to get rid of it?

On the plains and in the country the non cooperation movement was on the surge Followers of the Congress Party and its leaders were getting arrested and filling jails Gandhiji promised Swaraj in a year's time But the fulfilment of the promise depended on others and it remained an empty promise, a heaven

on one's palm as it were, as the Telugu saying goes Jails were filled only to be emptied after terms of imprisonment The sacrifices of the common people became useless and ineffective because they were all governed by the fetish of non-violence The young were disillusioned of the non-cooperation movement They looked for an alternative path within the mainstream of the liberation struggle What is the alternative path and how to take people on to that path?

Seetharama Raju tackled the challenge with coolness and organisation The hill people had their own age old bad habits which were a drag on whatever they did So Seetharama Raju inculcated temperance in them He organised Panchayat courts to settle disputes among the hill people so they could avoid going to the courts of the British rulers presided over by white man These activities of his were at best reformative But they were suspect in the eyes of the alien rulers So Seetharama Raju was brought under the purview of a hateful Act according to which he was confined to his place of residence and was to report to the police station every evening as proof that he had not gone out of the area Seetharama Raju did not offer resistance He obeyed and abided by the law But he had other plans

Seetharama Raju now began practising secretly at home fencing, archery and the use of fire arms After acquiring some proficiency he let it be known that he was going on a pilgrimage to Nepal No one distrusted the bearded Sanyasi Nepal or no Nepal he certainly visited Orissa In the forests of Jeypore then Gosain Shrihardass was organising the Khonds and Savaras, hill people, into 'Prayer Associations' to make them realise their strength Seetharama Raju went there to study the methods and learn

On his return Seetharama Raju decided to raise an army from among the hill people, train them in fire arms acquire both fire arms and help from outside to fight British rule He shifted his family to a safe place lest the British should blackmail and persecute them He set about his life's mission in all earnestness and untiring energy and devotion His aim was nothing less than Swaraj—not his own rule as the British manufactured slander went round The war cry of his army was 'Gandhiji ki Jai"! That is how he viewed his fight as a part and parcel of the larger

struggle under the leadership of Gandhiji With that battle cry he led his army into action on August 22, 1922 to capture the armoury from Chintapalli police station

The Chintapalli raid was the beginning of what came to be known soon later as Alluri Seetharama Raju *Fituri* *Fituri* is obviously an Urdu word meaning disturbance but this was no mean disturbance It was a *Fituri* for Freedom for Swaraj

Dressed like a soldier, in coarse red Khaddar, wearing turban, stockings and boots, Seetharama Raju led his army from Chintapalli to Krishnadevipeta, from one police station to another, to capture arms to arm his army His armed actions were governed by principles of strict morality He would not touch any Indian policeman or officer or Indian officials He had to feed and clothe his army And he always paid for food and clothing Even when a known police Informer was caught, he would scold, feed and let him off He was kind to his own people, not so kind to any alien who wanted to rule He wanted to play straight even with his enemies He would send exact information about his next action and its target A written message with a red chilli attached to it was tied to an arrow and the arrow was shot and lodged on the target This device was adopted so that the enemy should not and would not know where the arrow came from The astrologer that he was Seetharama Raju characteristically chose auspicious days and times for his raids on police stations!

The *Fituri* began to spread So also weird stories about the miraculous powers of Seetharama Raju the Sanyasi He was supposed to turn enemy bullets into water! Policemen would drop their arms and fall at his feet for his benediction He and his *Fituri* inspired the people and there were volunteers to join him in his worthy cause The Khonds and Savaras his old friends from the forests of Jeypore, began sending him help It was said that during this time he met Prithvi Singh and contacted the Chittagong revolutionaries On seeing *Fituri* successes the Indian officials even the Muthadars changed their mind and were helping the *Fituri* by collecting and sending information to Seetharama Raju about the moves of the British government The *Fituri* struck terror into the British and their English officers

Immediately after the Chintapalli action a major event took place on August 24 1922 There were two Englishmen Coward and Hayter, both veterans of the first world war They were

leading a police party towards Damanapalli where they were informed Seetharama Raju was camping In his turn Seetharama Raju also got information that they were coming to swoop down on him So he laid an ambush for them on the ghats of Damanapalli

In a thick jungle with a narrow path on one side of which was a ravine Seetharama Raju took position to confront the enemy And the enemy had its own tactics The advance party consisted of Indians only who walked past without noticing Seetharama Raju and his forces More Indians followed Seetharama Raju was too kind to kill his own countrymen even though they were on account of their bounden duty as employees on the enemy side Many a revolutionary fighter faced similar moral problems and some floundered on them because their weakness for the countrymen got the better of their task towards the enemy In war, especially a national liberation or class war you have to get the enemy no matter who he happens to be Or else the enemy will get you Unless this sound principle is implemented in practice enterprises of great moment are doomed foredoomed to failure

And then were put into action special police forces brought for the purpose from Assam and Malabar The Rajah of Jeypore sent his elephants to carry heavy loads of supplies through the forest The war veteran experience of Coward and Heyter in charge of the operations stood them in good stead Seetharama Raju was forced to fight in the end

In a night battle Seetharama Raju was beaten His side incurred heavy loss of men and material

In all revolutionary battles the leader or leaders must plan and win victory after victory unrelentingly They have to plan successive victories If they show any weakness they will be done for Their own men will have doubts and there will be desertions which are disastrous Now Seetharama Raju's men began grumbling He took them deeper and deeper into the forest both to protect them and to organise a better battle But supplies began to fall short of requirements and desertions became frequent So Seetharama Raju was compelled to revive and imbue morale in his army He knew his men and his countrymen well So he led them surprisingly to a place with the famous Satyanarayana

temple on a hill top, to Annavaram' His arrival electrified the whole area Thousands, came to see him the hero and saint, to have his darshan' blessings and benediction Mothers laid their babies at his feet so as to be blessed Wives of even officials came, washed his feet and sprinkled the water on their heads His popularity among the people was a booster It boosted, probably his own morale definitely the morale of his 'army'

Morale boosters no doubt, *are* important In ancient times, omens and soothsayers acted as morale boosters or as warnings But those were times when life was simple, technology low and strategy and tactics wellknown to each of the contending forces The times were different now and the forces to encounter are different with their own much more advanced technology, weapons, strategy and tactics Fights that do not take into account all these things are destined to face failure The subjective desires of the masses or their very highly respected leaders come to nothing if the weapons, the strategy and tactics that they use are not commensurate and, more importantly, if they do not prepare the entire people for the fight It is easy to initiate a struggle or a battle but the important thing is to sustain it and take it to a successful conclusion

Personal behaviour and precept may be exemplary as were Seetharama Raju's or if you like Gandhiji s from a certain point of view But they are immaterial to their missions And they did not stand them in good stead The fact is too well-known for any elaboration

Personally Seetharama Raju did not seem to lose his morale And, as soon as he got an opportunity he resumed his raids on police stations to capture arms Arms are, no doubt necessary But the entire people have to be prepared for an armed struggle if arms are to be successful Seetharama Raju went on capturing arms But he also went on losing his excellent men in the process Gantam Dora was killed His brother Mallu Dora was captured One of his loyal followers Yendu Padal, was betrayed Aggi Arju, a follower of his from the plains was caught alive because he was wounded in action Seetharama Raju s head carried a prize

As is only to be expected the whole area of Seetharama Raju's operations was under a reign of terror Oppression of the peo-

ple went on increasing Collective fines were imposed on villages Special Agency Commissioner Rutherford came down on innocent people with unrelenting harshness, cruelty and sadism

On the one hand, Seetharama Raju's best men were either killed or captured On the other hand, his supporters and sympathisers were being treated with unremitting cruelty and persecution Again, there was a question of ethics? What should Seetharama Raju do under the given circumstances?

Puzzled, he went out on a walk from his hiding in the hills alongside of a hill stream with a walking cane in hand and no weapon After a while, he felt thirsty and was having a drink of water in the stream. And he was pounced upon and captured Close by was the headquarters of Major Goodall in charge of the Assam Rifles

The policemen that captured Seetharama Raju were not sure of their own strength So they tied him to a cot so he would not be able to escape with the help of his 'power for miracles'

Seetharama Raju was carried and produced before Major Goodall, who had him untied immediately Seetharama Raju refused to shake hands with Goodall They had a heated exchange of words

Seetharama Raju expected that he would be produced before a magistrate, tried and punished for waging war against 'King Emperor' Goodall, however, did not bother about the niceties of the rule of law He had Seetharama Raju bound to a tamarind tree and ordered a Jamedar (Indian) to shoot The bullet, intended or not intended, hit Seetharama Raju above the left shoulder Goodall was enraged, shouted at the Jamedar, and, whipping out his own revolver, shot at Seetharama Raju's chest from close quarters With the blood that gushed out, Seetharama Raju s life ebbed away He died a martyr It was May 7, 1924

In 1922, Seetharama Raju wrote to a friend, 'Men are not immortal but fame and disgrace are eternal Virtue and sin are eternal Battle is the province of the Kshatriya If successful in battle, one enjoyed worldly fame and if dead while fighting, one attained Veera Swarga, the heaven of heroes" This was what Krishna preached to Arjuna in the Bhagawad Geeta

Seetharama Raju s dead body was taken to Krishnadevipeta where Rutherford, the Agency Commissioner, camped and after

identification, it was buried A brick platform with a plaque with his year of birth—1897—was raised

However, the people did not believe that their beloved, saintly Seetharama Raju was dead or could die They hoped he would come back and come back with a vengeance and fight the British and drive them away Strangely enough, the government itself was not sure that Goodall's victim was the real Seetharama Raju! Seetharama Raju was only twentyseven when he was killed but the legend of Seetharama Raju lives on among the people of Andhra Pradesh

Gandhiji while touring the area a few years later, described Seethrarama Raju as "a great hero' though he did not approve the young man's way of fighting for freedom Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose paid glowing tributes to him But the British government and some misguided Indian leaders called him a bandit However, Seetharama Raju is a part of the country's heritage, a part of our national liberation struggle Mogallu village where he was born, needs to be made memorable

Alluri Seetharama Raju and his *Eluru* his uprising against British rule and oppression are a glorious chapter in our fight for freedom That was the period of many an uprising and daredevil defiance Inspired by love of the country the heroes that died and the ones that survived to continue the fight aimed at the welfare of the masses Seetharama Raju's *Eluru* failed But all failure is a foundation for cumulative success That thought should be the inspiration for the living to achieve what has not yet been achieved even in the fourth decade after our Independence The well being of the working people is yet to be achieved Seetharama Raju and revolutionaries like him lay down their lives for that and for the country

No matter how strongly armed uprisings against the British were resented and condemned by Gandhiji and a section of the Congress leadership, it would be idle to hold forth that non-violence alone paid off in the end What shook British rule and the empire were the armed actions and the wholehearted support they received from the people Seetharama Raju's *Eluru* was one such significant armed action in our liberation struggle

IMPERIALISM VERSUS COMMUNISM FROM PESHAWAR TO MEERUT

MANJU CHATTOPADHYAY

As many rivers flow into a vast ocean diverse streams of struggles converged and added rich splendour to India s struggle for freedom One such stream rather neglected by historians is the Communist movement which emerged in India during the early twenties This trend which gathered strength from protracted struggles of the workers and peasants had been continuing through several decades even before this period However, imperialists recognised the Communist movement in India as extremely dangerous from their point of view and tried to strangle it at its birth From 1921 to 1933, they launched a series of conspiracy cases against the infant and young Communist movement, the landmarks being Peshawar, Kanpur and Meerut Conspiracy Cases They persecuted the Communists savagely in many other ways also But they failed in their objective The young Communist movement of India withstood the onslaught of imperialism and emerged stronger, a significant integral part of the national movement for freedom It is this early chapter, from Peshawar to Meerut that I propose to discuss in this paper using both primary and important secondary sources

(I)

In August 1914 the First World War had started with Britain France and Tsarist Russia on one side and Germany, Austria and Turkey on the other Almost the whole of Europe and some parts of Asia turned into battlefields The colonies were supplying war materials as well as men as cannon fodder In all colonies including India widespread resentment gradually developed into more or less active struggle The war had put British Imperialism in a tight corner and militant nationalists thought that this was a golden opportunity to wrest independence from alien hands A section of nationalist Muslims of India established

contact with the Turkish ruler and made Kabul a centre for fomenting revolutionary activities in India Another section of militant nationalists established contact with Germany and tried to secure arms from them to organise an armed rebellion in India

Veteran Communist leader Abdur Rezzak Khan writes 'We tried our best to utilise the wartime revolutionary situation to achieve Indian independence We also tried to unite these scattered revolutionary groups as also Hindu and Muslim masses for the common purpose of achieving Indian independence we were involved in the *Silk Letter Conspiracy* and appealed to our people not to cooperate with British war efforts and asked the Indian soldiers to revolt'[1]

The report of the Sedition Committee observed In August 1916 the plot known to the Government as the *Silk Letters* case, was discovered This was a project hatched in India with the object of destroying British rule by means of an attack on the North West Frontier, supplemented by a Mohammadan rising in the country'[2]

In 1915 Obeidullah Sindhi together with two friends Abdulla Fateh Muhammad and Muhammad Ali secretly left India travelled through the tribal areas in the North Western Frontier of India and reached Kabul In the meantime the Indian Independence Committee of Berlin sent Raja Mahendrapratap and Maulana Barkatullah to Kabul to set up a revolutionary centre there This Berlin Committee had close links with the Ghadar revolutionaries They also had contacts with the Muslim nationalists led by Obeidullah Kabul, thus became an important revolutionary centre during world war I

In October 1915, the revolutionaries set up a Provisional Government in Kabul with Mahendrapratap as President Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali as Prime Minister and Maulana Obeidullah Sindhi as Home Minister Their main aim was to overthrow British rule in India They printed three appeals—one for the Muslim masses, one for the Hindu masses and the third for all Indians where they gave the call for a revolutionary uprising throughout India in order to liberate the country Their activities spread far and wide to Sind Punjab U P and even to distant Bengal Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was connected with them Unrest started spreading in the ranks of the Indian army

They sent their instructions written on silk handkerchiefs The British intelligence later intercepted some letters and launched the Silk Letter Case

The British Government records Always they preach sedition Against their designs, the loyalty of the general Muslim community and the effective power of the Government are the only safeguards'[3]

In November 1917, the socialist revolution triumphed in Russia and shook the entire world The first breach was created in the solid structure of imperialism Oppressed people everywhere were inspired by a new hope

The war ended with Germany's defeat and surrender In the deserts of West Asia Anglo French imperialism tried to grab the vast oil resources Britain broke its promise to the Arab nationalists and announced her support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine The Indian Muslims, like Muslims of West Asia exploded in anger against the Britishers and started the Khilafat Movement On the other hand Revolutionary Russia's unilateral renunciation of unequal treaties with its weak small neighbours created a profound impact on the minds of all oppressed peoples including Indians Oppressed humanity now turned to Soviet Russia as their new centre of hope

In 1919, Maulana Barkatullah wrote a pamphlet called *Bolshevism and the Islamic Body Politic* Several thousand printed copies of this document reached India The British confiscated most of them In it Barkatullah wrote 'The dawn of human freedom has appeared in the Russian horizon, with Lenin as the shining sun distinction of race, religion and class has disappeared oh brethren! Know that you should not recoil from the Russian nation and the present Government of Russia You should rather shun those savage wolves of Europe who have usurped your homes and turned them into their own colonies '

In 1919 20 a large number of anti British Muslims declared *Jehad* against British rule in India and left the country Many of them went to Kabul and proceeded the Soviet Union Rafiq Ahmed was one of them In an interview he said There were many types of men among us Some were religious fanatics The youth thought that since the British had betrayed their pledge they would go to Turkey via Afghanisthan to fight the British

A small number from among them dreamt of seeking Soviet help to strike a shattering blow to British rule in India"

The Indian revolutionary Abdur Rab Peshawari met Lenin and established close contacts with the Bolsheviks He tried to bring the last batch of *Muhajirs* to the Soviet Union Quite a few Indians came to Tashkhand from Kabul In 1919 the Indian Revolutionaries held two mass meetings at Kabul and Tashkhand to greet and salute the young Soviet Republic In 1920, a band of 19 *Muhajirs* reached Tashkhand Among them were Rafiq Ahmed Shaukat Usmani Muhammad Akbar Khan and Abdul Majid They were received there by M N Roy and his wife Evelyn Abani Mukherjee and his wife and Muhammad Shafiq 'M N Roy talked at length with us Up to that time we had no idea as to what the Communist Party was In 1921 a Communist Party of India was set up in Moscow However to speak the truth the C P I was really formed earlier in 1920 at Tashkhand although we did not join it At Moscow the Party was affiliated to the Communist International Muhammad Shafiq became the first secretary of the party A working committee of the party was formed with M N Roy, Shafiq and Abani Mukherjee'

From 1921 a number of these young men tried to return to India but the British intercepted them midway The first batch was arrested at Chitral Immediately afterwards was started the first *Peshawar Bolshevik Conspiracy Case* The ten accused in this case were Mian Muhammad Akbar Shah, Gauhar Rahaman Khan Mir Abdul Majid, Firozuddin Mansur, Ahmed Nasim Rafiq Ahmed, Sultan Mahamud and three others The first of them was convicted with a sentence of one year"

In 1923, Shaukat Usmani was arrested at Kanpur and Muzaffar Ahmed was arrested at Lahore But they were not involved in the Peshawar case This conspiracy case did not create any significant impact either on our freedom struggle or on the revolutionary movement Yet the case is important both to understand imperialism's attitude towards the communists as well to know about the forces that led to the birth of a communist movement in India

This was a stormy period in Indian politics The Jalianwala Bag massacre had taken place in 1919 Even Gandhiji had talked of ending the 'Satanic Government" The Non Coopera-

tion and Khilafat movement led to a tumultous upsurge in India The peasants of *Chauri Chaura* had killed a few policemen in angry *retaliation* against police atrocities Gandhiji immediately called off the movement on the plea of shunning violence The British savagely sentenced to death 172 peasants of Chauri Chaura The Congress was silent, but to their credit, the young communists of India raised their voice of protest Later the death sentences were upheld in the case of the *Kisans*

In an appeal to the Indian working class M N Roy on behalf of the Communist Party of India wrote Working men and working women! the world had been shocked to hear of that prostitution of justice which has condemned to death 172 of the men arrested more than a year ago after the revolt of the exploited peasantry in the district of Gorakhpur was drowned in blood Workers of India! it depends upon you to save these men No idle resolution no expression of horror, no criticism of the Imperialistic justice will be of any avail working men and working women in India! declare a general strike and save the soldiers of freedom '

During this period the Communist International at the instance of Lenin sent a message of greetings to the Gaya Session of the Indian National Congress (1922) In 1923, imperialist circles were also convinced that in the next wave of unrest, a radical section of Congressmen Bengal revolutionaries and communists would forge a united front to give a new direction and a new dimension to the Indian revolution [9]

On May 31, 1923, the police arrested in one swoop, Shaukat Usmani Muzaffar Ahmed, S A Dange Nalini Gupta and Ghulam Hossain Towards the beginning of 1924, the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case was launched against them and also against M N Roy whom they could not arrest Cecil Kaye explicitly stated "the immediate and political dangers of the Communist movement in India, even as an isolated factor are sufficiently obvious On the one hand there have been communications with the representatives of the old Bengal revolutionaries many of whom are personal friends of M N Roy and who since the failure of the non cooperation movement have been moving towards a resumption of their former activities On the other hand C R Das and the extreme left of the Congress party have not concealed their intention to organise the proletariat to

resort to direct action Between these two groups Roy's Communists occupy a dangerously convenient tactical position"[10]

In May 1924, the Sessions Judge of Kanpur convicted Usmani, Dange, Muzaffar and Nalini to four years rigorous imprisonment Dange and Usmani served their full term, but Nalini and *Muzaffar were released in late 1925, on grounds of health* The inexperienced communists failed to exploit the Kanpur Conspiracy Case to their advantage and put up a mere legal defence M N Roy wrote to a friend in India "Poor fellows, if they could only have put up a better defence four years of jail would have been worthwhile"[11]

M N Roy and the Comintern however, put up a stout defence for the Kanpur accused 'Has socialist and Communist propaganda that is to say working class propaganda been declared illegal in Great Britain and the dominions? Then why should it be illegal in British India? Have Socialist and Communist parties, *that is to say working class parties*, been denied the right to exist in any other parts of the British empire? Then why should Indians be denied that right? Does affiliation to the Third International constitute a crime on the part of the Communist Party of Great Britain of Australia, Newzealand, Canada and South Africa? Then why does such affiliation on the part of the Communist Party of India constitute 'Seditious Conspiracy"?[12] (Roy's Open Letter to the British Government, March 21, 1924)

Towards the end of 1925 a conference was convened at the same Kanpur to form a Communist Party of India Controversy arose whether a Communist Party should be formed openly or not Janaki Prasad Bagerhatta wrote an article in the *Socialist* (edited by Dange) where he stated that "A Communist Party should be organised openly, a strong left wing party be formed inside the Congress, newspapers should be issued in Hindi and Urdu to popularise Communism"[13]

Roy did not quite agree with this point of view and wrote 'The fight for legal existence of the party does not mean legality at any cost We should not be deluded by the hypocritical pose of the Government, that Communist propaganda as such is not considered illegal But as soon as the Communist Party goes forward to its main task in India to the task of organising the

workers and peasants in their fight for complete national independence and for its socio economic programme, repression comes down upon its head as in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case "[14]

On December 26, 1925, the first Conference of the Indian Communists was held at Kanpur Maulana Hasrat Mohani became the Chairman of the reception committee Earlier, in 1921, at the Ahmedabad Session of the Indian National Congress, it was Mohani who had moved the resolution demanding complete Independence At that time the resolution had received only 9 votes[1] Singaravelu Chettiar, the eminent South Indian labour leader presided over the conference Among those who were present were Ghate, Joglekar and Nimbkar from Bombay, Majid from Lahore and of course Muzaffar Ahmed Ghate was elected the Secretary of the party and Muzaffar Ahmed was appointed the main organiser[15] Thus a new revolutionary party of the working class and the peasantry was born in India—the Communist Party of India

(II)

The working class movement of India was certainly older than the Communist Party The All India Trades Union Congress (AITUC) was born in Bombay in 1920 However, the impact of even the young communist movement was felt there Speaking at Lahore in 1923, as the President of the Third Session of the AITUC, C R Das declared, "Labour represents 98 per cent of the population of India, when we consider that labour also includes the peasants They need organisation The time has come when we should say boldly that the organisation of labour is absolutely necessary for Swaraj "[1]

In 1925, the *tonga* drivers of Lahore hoisted the red flag on May day and held a rally By 1927 the working class had taken to the streets in many centres of India with red flag in their hands

It was in 1927 that the British Communist leader of Indian origin and member of British Parliament Shapurji Saklatvala visited India He received a massive reception in Bombay in January and in Calcutta in February 1927 Addressing a workingclass rally in Calcutta Saklatvala said, 'Communism is the future of the world You must organise yourselves and start building a new society inspired by the ideals of Communism '[15]

On 12 February 1927 25 thousand railway workers at Kharagpur went on strike The Government sent troops to smash the strike Accompanied by railworkers leader V V Giri Saklatvala rushed to Kharagpur but the Government did not allow him to speak there Towards the middle of March railway authorities promised to consider sympathetically the demands of the strikers and also not to victimise any one of them On this basis the strike was settled However the authorities violated their promise and on September 7 1927 they issued notice to 1 700 workers that they would be retrenched The workers went on strike the very next day On 12 September the authorities declared lock out at Kharagpur [9] This strike lasted for six months

By 1927 the working class movement in India had reached maturity Railway workers all over India organised spontaneous strikes Even moderate labour leaders like V V Giri had to say the only path open before the railway workers is to go on general strike [10] In fact the Bengal Nagpur Railway strike was the first major general strike in which the communists played a significant part An anti communist historian has admitted that the communists by their intervention brought a qualitative change in the character of the strike [11]

In 1928 the railworkers of Liluah went on strike Nationalists socialists and communists joined hands to make this strike a success Among its leading organisers were Kiran Mitra Sivnath Banerjee Dharani Goswami Gopen Chakraborty and others The strike was supported by Subhas Chandra Bose then President of the BPCC and Mrinal Kanti Bose President of the BPTUC The entire working class of Bengal expressed solidarity with this striking railwaymen and raised 50 thousand rupees for the strikers

Gradually the strikes spread to other centres like Ondal and Asansol Other labour leaders joined the strike Among them was Radharaman Mitra who in a recent interview has said at the request of Kiran Mitra we came forward to support the railway strike Sprott Dharani Gulbale Chiranjilal Shroff and myself went first to Ondal and then to Asansol After determined and tireless effort we brought the workers out on strike

In May 1928 the *Statesman* mouthpiece of British Capital in India wrote that the Moscow school is actively at work in in

dustrial India is beyond question The Bengal strike leaders Indians and otherwise are avowed Communists and have lately had considerable success Moscow must be fought

Many years later, recalling this period Muzaffar Ahmed wrote A wonderful opportunity came to us to build up a powerful Communist Party on the basis of the working class struggles of 1928"[2]

The strikers of Liluah had deepened their class consciousness through the protracted struggle which they had waged Many were retrenched and they entered the nearby jute mill textile factory or some engineering plant as workers Usually they took the initiative in building up militant labour unions in their place of work

By June July 1928 Bengal was flooded with strikes Mom Singh went to Metiabruz while Radhuraman Mitra Bankim Mukherjee and Spratt went to Chengail and Bauria The Bengal Chatkal Majdoor Union was born at Chengail Very soon several lakhs of jute workers started moving forward towards a general strike in jute industry

Other provinces did not lag behind On April 15 1928 20 thousand textile workers of Bombay organised a massive rally From moderates to communists from Alweg to Nimbkar all T U leaders gave the call for a textile general strike

On April 26 70 per cent of Bombay's textile workers started a general strike involving 200 000 workers This strike lasted for 6 months It was an unprecedentedly heroic general strike As the strike went on the moderate leaders were pushed into the background and the communists as well as pro communist leaders came to the fore The newly born militant labour union—The Girni Kamgar Union (GKU) became the new weapon of struggle By the end of 1928 the GKU's membership rose to the phenomenal figure of 80 thousand This was then the largest mass union in India

The British rulers also noted this new development In an important official report they stated that the communists went out to capture the working class movement in India Their biggest success came in 1928 Utilising the weak organisation among textile workers as well as their protracted general strike the communists built up a 50 thousand strong powerful union"

The imperialist assessment tallies with the opinion of one of the communist strike leaders also "It was only during the process of the strike that the textile workers evolved and perfected their organisation, first in the form of a Strike Committee called the Joint Strike Committee in which under the pressure of the rank and file, the reformist section was compelled to join and when the strike was over, it was through the experiences of the strike that the workers realised the importance and significance of their class organisation It was as a result of the experience of the strike days that they raised within the space of the next few months one of the mightiest unions—the G K U "[4]

After 6 months of heroic strikes the textile workers went back to work with the red flag in hand This strike electrified the workers of India especially in Bombay Powerful unions sprang up under communist leadership—one in the dock area and the other in GIP Railway S S Mirajkar became the Secretary of the Dock Workers Union They went on strike in support of the textile workers In the far south even reformist led railway labour unions went on strike In June 1928, a spate of strikes took place in Sholapur, Kanpur and Jamshedpur The Government blamed the communists for all these strikes

Meanwhile a new mass upsurge was shaking the country—the great movement against the Simon Commission When in February 1928, the Simon Commission reached Bombay a 30 thousand strong militant demonstration of the working class jointly led by nationalists and communists, created a sensation in the city In December 1928, the Annual Session of the Congress was held at Calcutta A few days earlier the Annual Session of the AITUC was held at Jharia, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru On December 24 1928 the First All India Conference of the Workers and Peasants Party was also held at Calcutta presided over by Sardar Sohan Singh Josh Among those present were Mirajkar Ghate, Joglekar Nimbkar P C Joshi Muzaffar Ahmed Abdur Rezzak Khan Gopen Chakraborty Dharani Goswami and others Sardar Bhagat Singh then an absconder was also present there "[5]

However, the most significant event was the huge demonstration of workers that the Communist leaders brought to the Congress pandal at Calcutta in December, 1928 Even an orthodox rightwing Congress historian has commented "The Calcutta ses-

sion will be remembered for a demonstration in which the labourers numbering over 50 thousand men from neighbouring mill areas marched in an orderly fashion and saluted the National Flag hoisted in the Congress ground occupied the pandal for nearly two hours and passed their resolution deciding for independence for India and then walked out [30]

In January 1929 Calcutta witnessed a huge anti Simon black flag demonstration in which more than 50 per cent were workers The Government became frankly panicky Early in 1929, Lord Irwin Viceroy of India declared that The disquieting spread of Communism has for sometime been causing my Government anxiety

At least some communists noted that imperialism was preparing to attack the Indian communists Roy sharply commented The speech of the British Viceroy in the Indian Legislative Assembly on January 28, indicates how imperialism plans to meet the situation in India Imperialism recognises its most dangerous and determined enemy in the working class' [31] On March 20 1929 Imperialism arrested 31 communist and trade union leaders and started the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case

(III)

In one sudden swoop 31 leaders of the workingclass movement from all over India were arrested brought to Meerut jail and were accused of 'entering into conspiracy to deprive the king Emperor of his sovereignty of the British India' ' Those arrested were Muzaffar Ahmed, Gopen Chakraborty Dharani Goswami, Gopal Basak, Radharaman Mitra Ajodhya Prasad Kishori Lal Ghosh—all from Bengal, S A Dange S S Miraikar K N Joglekar R S Nimbkar S V Ghate G Adhikari M G Desai, A A Alve, S H Jhabvala, D R Thengdi and G R Kasle—all from Bombay Sohan Singh Josh M A Majid, K N Sehgal—all from Punjab Shaukat Usmani, P C Joshi L N Kadam Dr B N Mukherjee Gauri Shankar and Dharamvir Singh—all from U P and 3 Englishmen—Ben Bradley Philip Spratt and Lester Hutchinson A warrant of arrest was issued also against Amir Haidar Khan but he could not be arrested [32]

In the opening charge of the Meerut Conspiracy Case it was stated "That there exist in Russia an organisation called the

Communist International The aim of this organisation is by *creation of an armed revolution* to overthrow all the existing forms of Government throughout the world and to replace them by Soviet Republics subordinate to and controlled by the Central Soviet administration in Moscow In the year 1921 the said Communist International determined to establish a branch organisation in British India and accused Sripad Amrit Dange Shaukat Usmani and Muzaffar Ahmed entered into a conspiracy with certain other persons to establish such branch organisation with a view to deprive the King Emperor of his Sovereignty of British India

Langford James Chief public prosecutor on the Government side in his opening speech made a virulent propaganda tirade against the rising communist movement, the main aim of which was to drive a wedge between the communists and the Indian nationalists James contended that the defendants were not seeking a national revolution but an anti national revolution He pictured the Communists as persons who were opposed to God and family alike and hence not spiritually akin to India He warned that they had nothing but hatred and contempt for the country s nationalist leaders They scorned Motilal Nehru as a dangerous patriot Jawaharlal Nehru as tepid reformist', Subhas Chandra as 'ludicrous careerist' and Gandhi as a grotesque reactionary' ' [30]

But the situation took an entirely different turn The Meerut prisoners vigorously defended themselves and put imperialism in the dock All anti imperialist Indians rallied to their cause A Meerut Defence Committee was set up with Motilal as President and Jawaharlal as Secretary Almost every nationalist lawyer worth his name defended the Meerut prisoners Meerut had become a place of pilgrimage and many national leaders such as Sarojini Naidu Kelkar, Asaf Ali Nariman and others used to visit us periodically They would bring us sweets eatables fruits and so on ' [31]

The nationalist press also popularised the Meerut Case and generally stood by them The Calcutta communists in their journal wrote ' To day all over the world the Capitalists are afraid of the Communists and of Communism Meerut shows that India too is no exception "[32]

Of the 31 Meerut prisoners the majority were Communists 18

of them after elaborate discussion prepared a joint statement and placed it before the court In its preamble they declared

We do not plead for mercy or even for justice before this court This is a class court and in relation to an offence directed against the ruling class itself the conception of justice has no meaning We know that this court will not give us justice but nevertheless we do not passively offer ourselves as a sacrifice to the cruelty of imperialism we are convinced that a democratic revolution will achieve the complete freedom of India from the control of British Imperialism and the complete abolition of all feudal forms of social organisation This is the revolution for which we were working and we are convinced that the programme which we put before the country the programme of the united anti imperialist front of all those classes capable of carrying through the revolution was the only correct programme for attaining it The 18 signatories to the joint statement were Sohan Singh Josh Gangadhar Adhikari Muzaffar Ahmed Gopal Basak S S Mirajkar P C Joshi S V Ghate K N Joglekar R S Nimbkar Dharani Goswami Gopen Chakraborty Radharaman Mitra, Samsul Huda Ajodhya Prasad Shaukat Usmani Abdul Majid Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley [6]

This statement created a stir in India and abroad The Lahore conspiracy case was also on at that time From that courtroom Bhagat Singh and his Comrades sent greetings to the Meerut accused This was the time when India was ablaze with the Chittagong uprising the Sholapur general strike and the Peshawar episode The jails were full with patriots and revolutionaries They all read the Meerut statement with admiration

Abroad a great international campaign was going on for the release of the Meerut prisoners Among those who signed an appeal demanding the release of the Meerut prisoners were the world famous scientist Albert Einstein the French Savant Romain Rolland and the great British playwright George Bernard Shaw

After four long years of trial the Sessions Judge gave savage sentences to the accused—life sentence for Muzaffar Ahmed and heavy sentences for all the rest A chorus of protests however compelled the Court of Appeal to considerably reduce the sentences Thus ended the historic Meerut Conspiracy Case

Fifty years later looking back an accused in the case summed it up thus Meerut Conspiracy Case was a landmark not only in the Communist movement but also in the national political life of this country The case itself made legal history—no political trial of this magnitude had taken place before The case attracted the attention of all political workers The Communist movement gained a lot as a result of this trial The propaganda for Socialism that we had carried on from the platform of the Meerut Court struck roots and hundreds of young people came round and joined the Party later Meerut helped the Communist movement to develop the party on a national scale [5]

Somnath Lahiri outstanding Communist leader of Bengal had come into the movement early in 1930 Writing about Meerut he said

In January 1933 came the news of the savage sentence on the Meerut accused This hammer blow sharpened our political consciousness and shattered many illusions We were a small Communist group in Calcutta then but this attack enabled us to have the audacious dream of a united All India Communist Party which would counter attack imperialism and challenge the bourgeois national leadership of India as a revolutionary alternative

The concept of unity and struggle spread everywhere above all through the rising workingclass struggles A new revolutionary force was clearly on the rise From the period of darkness we were definitely marching forward towards a new dawn [6]

NOTES

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7 *Ibid* pp 47-49

8 Gautam Chattopadhyay *Communism and Bengal's Freedom Movement* Vol 1 1970 pp 76 78

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11 G Chattopadhyay *op cit* p 84

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15 Pattabhi Sitaramayya *History of the Indian National Congress* Vol I p 207

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22 G Chattopadhyay *op cit* pp 107 111

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28 K N Joglekar's Statement *Meerut Case Documents* p 1936

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37 S S Mirajkar *Reminiscence Marxist Miscellany* No 15 p 18

38 *Din Majur* Vol I No 1 Calcutta September 1932

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41 Ajoy Ghosh *Bhagat Singh and his Comrades* PPH Delhi February 1979 p 29

42 Mirajkar *op cit* p 28

43 Somnath Lahiri Andhakar Theke Alo *Kalantar* (Puja Number) 1381/1974

PATHAN NATIONALISM AND PESHAWAR DISTURBANCES, 1930

KAMALA MUKHERJEE

The region of Peshawar valley (known as Gandhara in ancient times) along the north west frontier of India is mentioned in the Rigveda The people of this region are known as Pakhtun or Pathan The written language came in the fifteenth century which is written in the Persian script and is spoken by the 10 million of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India The language is the most obvious symbol of Pakhtun identity and pride The majority of the people are agriculturists

The North-West Frontier Province is bounded on the north by the Hindukush Range, on the south by Baluchistan on the east by Kashmir and Punjab and on the west by Afghanistan The majority of the people are Muslims of the orthodox Sunni sects with a five per cent mixture of Hindus, Sikhs and Christians Its territories fall under three geographical categories—the Indus district of Hazara the narrow strip between the Indus and the hills constituting the settled trans-Indus districts of Peshawar Kohat, Bannu, Mardan and Dera Ismail Khan and the rugged mountainous region between these districts and the present border with Afghanistan (Durand Line) Of these territories a little over one-third is covered by the six settled areas or districts The remaining two-thirds or (25,000 sq miles) are held by the tribes either of the Tribal Belt or of the independent territory who for a century resisted subjugation by the British Every man of the different tribes possessed arms Passage by a main route through the mountains had to be secured by force in the past decades

The Indus is the ethnic boundary between the Pathan lands and the rest of India The Tribal Belt is held by four important tribes Afridis, Mohomads Wazirs and Mahsuds Other tribes are

Ovakzais Yusufzais Muhmadzais Bhittanis Sinwaris and several others who inhabit Buner and the hilly country beyond the vale of Peshawar The Pathans are divided into several dozen separate tribes which are in turn divided into Khels which are roughly equated with clans They live according to their law—Pakhtunwali—the way of Pathan Families are regulated by customs and not by sacred law The tribal area with a 4 million population practically have no law courts judges or lawyers or police but crimes are absent Rules of revenge (badla) and hospitality (melmastia) are strictly followed The mullah or the priest plays an important role in the Pathan territory The most important Pathan institution is the *jirga* meaning assembly of elders The more democratic a tribe the wider the *jirga* there is no voting decisions are unanimous and are arrived at by taking the sense of the meeting Its main effort is not to inflict punishment but to achieve a settlement They are completely different from those in the neighbouring Punjab To quote Elphinstone Their vices are revenge envy avarice perfidy and obstinacy on the other hand they are fond of liberty faithful to their friends kind to the dependents hospitable hardy frugal laborious and prudent less disposed than their neighbours to fashion intrigue and deceit

In 1857 during the Sepoy Mutiny its wind passed lightly over the frontier The Pathans unwilling to take advantage of the situation while the Revolt was on renewed their own battle almost immediately afterwards Between 1858 1902 there took place more than forty British expeditions —40 000 troops were employed against the Afridis and Ovakzais in 1897 According to the Simon Commission North West Frontier is not only the frontier of India—it is an international frontier of the first importance—or a gateway to India

During 1930 1931 these areas were included in the Punjab The Sulaiman Committee while giving a vivid description of the events justified military force

The All India Congress Committee also appointed an Enquiry Committee headed by Shri Vithalbhai Patel but it was not allowed to enter the NWFP So the Committee came to Rawalpindi and examined some 70 witnesses from there post They recorded all the rele

At the outset the British controlled only Peshawar the main towns and the connecting roads The main passes including the Khyber were still controlled by the hill tribes some of them owing allegiance to the Amir of Afghanistan As time went on the British introduced laws and courts throughout the districts between the Indus river and the border hills and began to extend their influence up the passes The Pathans fought back killing the tax collectors and sometimes ambushing a British patrol

Towards the end of the century the situation changed due to the forward policy of Tsarist Russia Security was then the all important factor So Afghanistan was looked as a buffer state The settled districts along the Indus were made an integral part of India The tribal territory in the hills was the base and jumping ground which must be dominated The passes were occupied new roads were built and forts were built with garrisons It was part of the forward policy later known as the Durand Line According to Colin Davis isolated forts with British controlled garrisons commanded the trade route running through the territory

The proud Pathans reacted instinctively and violently Every tribe on the frontier was up in arms at one time or another Traditions of hospitality were violated as British civilians were ambushed and killed The British retaliated Tribesmen were transported to the Andaman Islands villages crops wells and fruit trees were destroyed women and children starved by blockade The British controlled the passes and the roads though they were never able to establish control over the hills In 1901 under Lord Curzon's auspices a new province called the North West Frontier Province was formed this included all the settled areas beyond the Indus with a strip of tribal territory between Afghanistan and the province under a Chief Commissioner Special laws and regulations were enforced for the

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went and important communiqués issued by the Government from time to time and also the press reports confirm the evidence recorded by the Sullivan Committee The 350 page Report was promptly banned but copies were widely circulated

province Under the Frontier Crimes Regulations people could be sentenced to transportation for life without being legally tried in a court

When the Morley Minto Reforms of 1909 and the Montford Reforms of 1919 were duly introduced in the rest of India, the North-West Frontier Province was entirely left out The provisions of the Frontier Crimes Regulations were often used against those who advocated reforms for the Province These regulations were intended for punishing crimes but were used against political workers The wind of political unrest after the first World War was felt in the frontier area The name of Abdul Ghaffar Khan first came into public notice in 1919 when he led an agitation in common with the rest of India against the repressive Rowlatt Act The North West Frontier Province fully participated in the movement There were unprecedented hartals all over the province A large number of people attended a meeting held at Utmanzai on April 6, 1919 presided over by Abdul Ghaffar Khan The Government was worried as the war with Afghanistan had started King Amanullah was sympathetic to the Indian national movement. Soon martial law was declared in the Peshawar district The police arrested Ghaffar Khan and his colleagues and lodged him into Mardan Jail His feet were fettered He was regarded as an ordinary but dangerous convict After these arrests and imprisonment, the troops went to Utmanzai and surrounded the village and collected all the villagers in the compound of a school Then the troops looted the village A punitive fine of Rs 30,000/ was imposed on the villagers Over a hundred and fifty people were kept in jail until the fine was paid Behram Khan and other relatives of Abdul Ghaffar Khan were kept in jail for three months

After his release in 1920, Abdul Ghaffar Khan went to Delhi in the beginning of 1920 to participate in the Khilafat Conference in which Gandhi Hakim Ajmal Khan, the Ali Brothers, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many other Muslims participated The Khilafat movement and its offshoot the *hijrat* movement excited the Muslim world of north-western India and the frontier area and they wanted to protest against the British injustice done to the Caliph of Turkey

Abdul Ghaffar Khan had meanwhile begun to establish a number of schools to educate the people For this he used to travel a lot in the villages much to the dislike of the British rulers Off and on they closed the schools on some pretext and sometimes prohibited his movement In 1920 he attended the Nagpore Congress session where the resolution on non-co-operation was finally passed Abdul Ghaffar Khan was greatly attracted to Gandhi and his programme of Swaraj through peaceful means Subsequently, Abdul Ghaffar Khan said "that as a result of spread of education and participation in some political agitation most of the Pathans are beginning to understand that their freedom can well harmonise with the conception of Indian freedom and so they joined hands with most of their countrymen in the common struggle The days of isolation are no more A new conception of international collaboration and co-operation is born The Pathans hate compulsion and dictation of any type—but of their own free will they are to prepare to work in unity with others in their country as well as with tribal brothers, who have so long kept aloof But never can I deny them the right of self determination" The old feeling of fear and frustration had completely disappeared and there was a strange feeling of nationalism, religion and mysticism Ghaffar Khan went to Lahore to attend the Khilafat Conference and on his return became the President of the Khilafat Committee in Peshawar Shortly afterwards he was arrested and sentenced for three years along with other people among whom there were many holy crusaders Three years in several jails including the one at Dera Ghazi Khan completely baptized him. He saw the sufferings of the common people in jails and had an opportunity to know the leaders of Hindu and Sikh communities By reading their Holy Books and holding discussion his leadership qualities acquired a broader perspective His arrest and imprisonment made the Azad schools established by him all the more popular That also annoyed the authorities. From 1924 onwards the rift between the Ali Brothers and the Congress began to widen During 1924-28 communal riots broke out in many parts of the N W F P In 1929 Abdul Ghaffar Khan met Congress leaders like Gandhiji and Nehru in a Congress meeting After some days, he and other colleagues came to know of and

were inspired by the victory of Nadir Khan in Afghanistan The Pathans organised a procession and a meeting over which Abdul Ghaffar Khan presided One organisation Anjuman Islah ul Afaghina which was working for the spread of education was formed

A monthly paper *Pakhtun* was published which was banned afterwards Another organization Khuda Khidmatgar the servants of God was formed in September 1929 At first it was a completely non political organisation but the British policy of oppression compelled it to participate in politics Its aim was to infuse among the Pakhtuns the spirit and consciousness of service to the community and the country in the name of God To become a Khuda Khidmatgar one had to take an oath to shun violence and evil customs and to cultivate good habits and lead a simple life develop good character and serve the people Abdul Ghaffar Khan went from village to village talking to the Pakhtuns The volunteers all wore clothes of crimson colour—as white clothes soon became dirty Thus they were called Red Shirts due to the dark brown red colour of their dress Abdul Ghaffar Khan set up a network of committees of local people called jirgas in every village Several villages formed a lower committee next came the tehsil and district committees Above all there was the provincial Jirga or the unofficial Parliament of the Pakhtuns All these were elected bodies Only the Salar e Azam or the Commander in Chief of the volunteers was nominated by him—who in turn appointed other officers of the different units These volunteers rendered free service and paid for their dresses They pledged to make even the greatest sacrifice when the occasion demanded They had their own flags The women volunteers wore black dress The volunteers maintained order at public meetings and helped villagers in need They were regularly drilled and taught to take long marches in military fashion with bagpipes drums flags etc But they bore no arms nor carried any weapons Thus the Khuda Khidmatgar movement aimed at teaching the Pakhtuns industry and economic self-reliance by inculcating in them fear of God

After the Calcutta Congress session (1928) the Resolution for complete independence was passed at the Lahore Congress

in 1929 Hundreds of volunteers from the N W F P attended the Lahore Congress In 1930, the declaration of Independence was adopted Frontier volunteers danced with joy amidst the shouts of Inqilab-Zindabad Their fresh minds were impressed and they returned home with a sense of unity with the rest of India The observance of the Independence Day on January 26th in various parts of the N W F P unnerved the British officers who warned them repeatedly On March 12 1930 Gandhiji set out on for the historic Dandi March, on April 14, Nehru, the Congress President, was arrested

The first official meeting of the Khudai Khidmatgars was convened at Utmanzai on April 18 and 19, 1930 About 200 Red Shirts attended the meeting On April 23 Abdul Ghaffar Khan addressed a mass meeting there exhorting people to participate in the civil disobedience movement Before he could reach Peshawar by car for organising the movement, he was arrested at the Naki Police Thana and brought back to Charsadda With him were also arrested Mian Ahmed Shah, Secretary of the Afghan Youth League, Abdul Akbar Khan President, and Salar Sarfaroz Khan and Shah Nawaz Khan the organisers The Naki people enraged by this resolved to join the movement as a reaction to this insult They assembled in thousands at Charsadda On that very day other associates of Abdul Ghaffar Khan were also arrested which caused great commotion in Kissa Khani Bazar Many people were killed by firing At Charsadda where Abdul Ghaffar Khan was arrested, the people surrounded the jail and later lay down before the van which was taking him to Mardan In all these events they remained peaceful Later they allowed the military to take the van at the request of their leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan All other prisoners from Delhi, Punjab and the Frontier were sent to Gujarat Jail in the Punjab Next day at Utmanzai (birth place of Abdul Ghaffar Khan), a meeting was held Dr Khan Sahib, Abdul Ghaffar Khan's elder brother, presided over it and requested the people to disperse peacefully These groups were attacked by a squad of cavalry who charged them even as they lay flat on the ground

One other centre of great agitations was Peshawar city The programme of the local Congress committee was to picket the

liquor shops after giving notification on April 23 1930 But the members of the All India Congress Committee were banned by the military authorities to see and meet the local Congress men In protest a huge procession was taken out which met at Shahi Bag to protest against government order and to start the picketing of liquor shops from 23rd April The authorities arrested the leaders in the early hours of the morning The people met at the Congress office and learnt that warrants had been issued against two more leaders Picketing started There was spontaneous hartal in the city At 9 a m the people were standing on the road to give farewell to the volunteers when a police sub inspector came in a lorry to the Congress office and wanted the two leaders The latter came out of the office and sat in the lorry On the way its tyres got punctured The two arrested leaders told the S I that they would themselves go to the Police thana if he had no objection The sub inspector agreed and went away The procession started with the leaders in front and reached the Kabuli Gate thana. They found the gates of the thana closed All efforts to open it proved futile The Assistant Commissioner of Police arrived on horseback when people shouted slogans He got angry and left the place Meanwhile the sub inspector who came to arrest the leaders told the people to remain non violent and disperse The leaders went inside the thana and the people began to disperse with shouts of Inqilab Zindabad and Mahatma Gandhiji ki jai Suddenly two or three armoured cars came in great speed from behind without giving any warning of their approach and drove into the crowd Several people were run over some were injured and some were killed on the spot The people though not armed at all behaved with great restraint collecting the dead and wounded persons Some people went in front of the car and implored the soldiers to stop the car The crowd swelled and there was excitement and firing The authorities charged that they fired only when bricks and stones were thrown (the operation was carried out by Cap Brooke Powell (Mr Isemonger's statement Home Pol/930 No 393) Shots were fired according to them twice between 1 15 and 2 p m According to them shots were fired for quelling the civil disturbance when people became furious and made street barricades At that

time one English Major (a messenger) came dashing on a motor cycle The cycle collided with the armoured car the Englishman fell down and was run over by the car Fire was opened by somebody in the car and somehow the car caught fire The military authorities blamed the crowd for this The Deputy Commissioner came out of the car and while proceeding to the thana he fell down unconscious But soon he regained consciousness and ordered the crew of the armoured car to fire as a result of which several people were killed and wounded The crowd was pushed back to some distance but they refused to disperse unless they were allowed to remove the dead and the injured and the armoured cars and troops were removed As the authorities did not remove the armoured car the people remained there prepared to receive bullets The second firing began and lasted for three hours not only in Kissa Khani Bazar but also in the bye lanes About 200 to 250 persons were killed and many more were wounded Five or six Khilafat volunteers were also killed The Khilafat volunteers and others were able to collect 60 dead bodies other dead bodies were taken by the authorities in a lorry to some unknown destination A large number of wounded were taken to the Congress office and were sent to the Lady Reading Hospital The Government did not minimise the matter At 6 in the evening the military raided the Congress office and removed the flags brought by the volunteers During the shootings in Kissa Khani Bazar Wali Khan the fourteen year son of Abdul Ghaffar Khan was standing nearby On being asked his name he gave out his name when a British soldier pointed a bayonet to him but a Muslim soldier pushed his hand from the rifle and another Muslim sub-inspector, incharge of the arrested persons pushed the boy inside a mosque

For the next two or three days Peshawar became a hell to live in owing to the atrocities of British troops Then suddenly the authorities left the city to the mercy of transborder raiders and plunderers The volunteers came forward to meet the situation On May 4 the military suddenly came back and took charge of the city which was practically under Martial Law The military came to search Congress and Youth League offices removed all cash, assaulted a large number of volunteers and even looted a shop nearby From that day life liberty or property of nobody

was safe. On May 31 when the Government appointed the Sulaiman Enquiry Committee for holding an enquiry in Peshawar the military opened fire on people who were carrying dead bodies of two children alleged to have been killed by firing. It had become a reign of terror with the city kept closed to the outside world. Similar events happened in other parts of Peshawar district where the Congress had some influence. The Congress organisation and the Youth League were declared illegal. Yet the spirit of the people remained unbroken and the number of volunteers swelled.

A significant feature of the incidents in Peshawar was the defiant refusal by a platoon of the Garhwal Rifles which previously had always been distinguished for its loyalty under the leadership of C. S. Garhwali to fire against the unarmed and peaceful crowd. They were promptly arrested and disarmed. Seventeen men were sentenced, one to life transportation, another to 15 years R.I. and the rest to terms of R.I. varying from 3 to 10 years.

The tribal disturbances that followed these events unnerved the British. The Hajt of Turang Zai was so shocked by British atrocities that he appealed to the frontier brethren that they should not entertain any fear. He disclosed that he was organising a contingent to punish the Britishers. There were stirrings in the tribal area and a big British force was kept in readiness to meet the emergency. The hide out of the Hajt and his followers was repeatedly bombed and once the artillery was taken to fire into the mouths of the caves which they had occupied in the mountain passes. In August, the Afridis helped by the villagers advanced across the frontier. A strong British force was employed against them. Hundreds of bombs were dropped in a day. The telegraph and telephone communications were cut in several places. In defending the use of such force in the N.W.F.P., the Government said it was intended to prevent the Red Shirts from becoming too violent. *"The brutes must be ruled brutally and by brutes."* According to *India in 1930-1*, a Government Publication, martial law was imposed from August 1930 to January 1931 because symptoms of unrest began to manifest all along the Frontier from Hazara to Dera Ismail

Khan As a result of the operation of the Red Shirt organisation led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan militant ideas spread even in the rural areas The nature of tribesmen changed so much as a result that they even abstained from looting in the customary manner and that the Afridis when negotiating a settlement with the authorities put forward demands for the release of Malang Baba (the naked Fakir Gandhi), Badashah Khan and other Khudai Khidmatgars "Stop atrocities and repression against the Pathans" they said "If you don t we shall declare war upon you' Clearly nationalism had penetrated into the psychology of the turbulent Pathans Pathan nationalism had come of age as an important constituent of Indian nationalism Of particular significance was the refusal of the Garhwali troops to comply with the shooting orders The spectre of military disaffection must have undermined the morale of the Raj

NOTES

1 *Abdul Gaffar Khan* B G Tendulkar Gandhi Peace Foundation Bombay, 1967

2 Home Department, Political—1930 Nos 393 206, 255/V pt II

3 Home Department, Pol & K W 1930 255 62 (National Archives of India)

4 Peshawar Enquiry Committee Report

5 *Thrown to the Wolves* Purcell, 1966

SHOLAPUR WORKERS UPRISING (1930)

M K PANDHE

This year India will be observing the fiftieth anniversary of three notable events in the history of the freedom movement in 1930 namely the heroic action of the Chittagong Armoury Raiders the revolt of the Indian army in Peshawar and the uprising of the workers in Sholapur

The uprising in Sholapur which shook the foundations of the imperialist power in the city though for a short period clearly highlighted the role of the working class in the freedom movement This mighty action in spite of its spontaneous character has shown to what extent the freedom struggle could go if the working class and the poor in the town play a prominent role in the struggle against imperialism Some contemporary British commentators expressed fears that the entire British Army stationed in India would be insufficient to deal with the situation if many more towns rose in revolt in a similar manner

The simmering discontent among the thirty thousand textile workers employed in the five mills two of them British owned provided a good background to the upsurge The ten thousand handloom workers were living in the most poverty stricken conditions The trade union movement was in its infancy though several struggles were fought by the workers against inhuman exploitation Their rising political consciousness was reflected in their participation in large numbers in political rallies held in the city on the eve of the upsurge The mill gates were also centres of continuous agitation rousing anger against economic privation and foreign domination

The workers of Sholapur had seen the red flag in February 1930 during the 25 day strike of the GIP Railway workers (now Central Railway) Every day they used to take out a procession in the city with red flags They braved police repression and

° This article was written in 1980

eviction of from Railway Quarters On February 22 when Shri C Rajagopalachari visited Sholapur he noted the presence of railway workers with red flags in his meeting and appealed to the people in the city to express solidarity with the strikers

There was also a three month old strike in 1928 in all the textile mills during which the workers had fought tenaciously It was in this strike that a branch of the Bombay Textile Labour Association was formed in the city

The heroic struggle commenced with the strike and Hartal on 6th May, 1930 in protest against the arrest of Gandhiji two days earlier The local Congress Party gave a call for Hartal to shopkeepers students lawyers etc only on May 7 In a public meeting on 6th May the workers raised the question whether they should go on strike but they were given a negative reply by the speakers However, the workers spontaneously decided to join the protest against imperialist oppression The brutal lathi charge near the mill gates by the British police angered the workers who also hit back forcibly injuring some policemen and officials A massive procession was taken out in the city condemning police zoolum On their way they destroyed the toddy and liquor shops around the mill area pouring their liquor on the streets

In a letter to Home Secretary Government of Bombay on May 7, 1930 Mr H F Knight, District Magistrate Sholapur, wrote I regret the damage done to the liquor shops but with 18 000 mill hands loose about the place or in large processions it was obvious that 100 armed police were useless if scattered or in small parties guarding liquor shops, etc A large number of patriotic city youth also joined the workers subsequently Violating the Satyagraha principle of giving prior information to the police some militant workers and the city youth cut several toddy (Palm) trees and faced the police heroically

On May 8 the strike continued and the workers and the city youth went ahead with the programme or cutting more toddy trees in the outskirts of the city They erected barricades to prevent the police from reaching them To disperse the crowd of about ten thousand and save the police from encirclement, the District Magistrate ordered firing killing several persons However seeing the angry mood of the crowd, the police officials

and the District Magistrate ran away from the scene The agitated crowd then stormed the nearby Mangalwarpeth Police Station and set it on fire killing two policemen The people attacked other police stations and most of the policemen fled leaving the police stations deserted

The surging patriotic masses then attacked the entire District Court complex a symbol of imperialist tyranny and set it on fire destroying all the records and the court buildings The jubilant crowd continued their attacks on all the vestiges of imperialism

Apprehending that the people would attack the District Collector's Office and civil lines the authorities with the help of two police vans full of British armed personnel resorted to reckless firing without any warning in the main thoroughfares of the central town hitting anyone who came in the way Though according to official figures only 12 persons were killed the actual number is estimated to be much higher Several injured persons did not report for fear of arrest The Municipal records about the dead persons were taken away by the District Magistrate

The panic stricken District Magistrate and the D S P ran away from the city Families of several British officials were sent to Poona Taking advantage of the fact that the two policemen of Mangalwarpeth police station were Muslim the authorities tried to give a communal colour to the struggle but did not succeed Though May 9 was the Bakr Id celebration day it passed on peacefully without any communal clashes

A battalion of Bombay Grenadiers and two battalions of Royal Officers left for Sholapur to suppress the uprising While preparations were being made to crush the unarmed people's resistance in Sholapur the city administration had collapsed completely for three days from the 10th to the 12th There was practically no government in the city which was virtually controlled by the people Attempts were made to establish a parallel administration in an extremely rudimentary form Leading newspapers in the country reported that tricolour raj was established in the city

The Associated Press correspondent in the *Times of India* reported

'British Raj is ended Gandhi Raj is here is the conviction sought to be created in the minds of peasants, mill hands and small dealers in the bazars in Sholapur Those who attempt to create this impression point to the abandoned bungalows of European residents the empty police chowkies and the absence of the familiar policemen from the streets The strongest evidence of all they see, and ask others to see in the charred ruins of the District Magistrate's Court with all its available old records, and they declare that it symbolises the destruction of British Sircar Proof of the advent of Gandhi Raj is according to them ample in the presence of Congress volunteers at street corners where formerly policemen used to stand and regulate the traffic Frequent parading of streets by the military is to them only spasmodic display of force by the dying regime and when this afternoon military pickets from the heart of the city were entirely withdrawn, it seemed to them the end had come as they expected'

A typical mood of the people was seen in the telegram from the Government of Bombay to the Central Government on May 11, 1930 which read "Situation in Sholapur deteriorated since yesterday evening One of two lorry patrols broke down and was surrounded by crowd which remained peaceful but which refused to disperse when ordered Eventually lorry was towed back Contents of the city police station removed and burnt on road and national flag hoisted"

The struggle also spread to Walsang a town eight miles from Sholapur where too the police station was set on fire by the people

How the national leadership was viewing the developments could be seen from the signed interview given by Gandhiji in Jail to the special representative of the *Daily Herald* which was reported by the *Times of India* dated 23rd May 1930

"he (Gandhiji) was gravely alarmed at the violence said to have been committed at Sholapur He grieved at the death of two policemen killed there but he was convinced the violence had not come from the civil resisters They had he said been ordered to suffer everything even violence without offering resistance'

The photostat copy of the interview with Gandhiji's signature was published by the journal

The Working Committee of the All India Congress Committee which met in Allahabad on May 13, 1930 referred to the "mob violence' in its press communique issued after the meeting, which stated

> 'The Committee regrets the outbreak of mob violence in certain places and cannot too strongly condemn such violence The Committee desires to emphasise the necessity of the strict observance of non-violence " (*Times of India, May 19, 1930)*

On the night of May 12 Martial Law was promulgated by the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in the city of Sholapur with the provision to extend it in the entire district, if necessary Under the Martial Law regulations hundreds of workers and other sections of the people were arrested and heavy punishment was inflicted upon them without giving them any chance of defence Owing to a reign of terror no person in the town could come forward to give any evidence in defence of the accused Many innocent citizens were victims of the vendetta of the state-managed trials Even the President of Sholapur Municipality was arrested and punished for his refusal to act as Magistrate on behalf of foreign rule

Shri Rambhau Rajwade, Editor of a local newspaper *Karmayogi published a special issue of the journal on May 10, 1930* vividly depicting the wanton firing by the British armed personnel He was fined Rs 10,000 and sentenced to 7 years rigorous imprisonment Four leading personalities in the movement Sarvashri Mallappa Dhanashetti, a shop assistant, Kurban Hussain, a journalist and trade union worker, Jagannath Shinde, a local youth leader, and Shrikisan Sarada, a businessman, were involved in a false murder case and were sentenced to death

A voice of protest against the repression in Sholapur was raised all over India demanding withdrawal of the Martial Law and cancellation of the death sentences Hundreds of processions and rallies were organised The issue was raised in Bombay as well as in the Central Councils and British Parliament but the British Government was determined to punish them They were

ultimately sent to the gallows on 12th January 1931 in the Yarawada prison The Government was earlier conspiring to hang them in public but seeing the protests everywhere, the Government changed its mind and refused to even handover the dead bodies of the heroes to their family members.

The martial law regime continued for 49 days and was ultimately withdrawn on June 30, 1930 Several workers in the Martial Law period went underground and carried on the struggle despite heavy odds An estimated 25,000 people left the town during the Martial Law period for fear of reprisals

The workmen s and people s uprising in Sholapur had shown a path of militant freedom movement against imperialist domination It was a path basically different from what was chalked out by the then leadership of the national movement It also highlighted how heroically the workers and the toiling masses fight when they take the initiative into their hands It was suppressed by the armed might of the imperialist power which however could not suppress the anti imperialist feelings that gripped the minds of the workers and the city poor

THE WARLI REVOLT (1945 47)

NARAYAN H KULKARNEE

The Warlis are an aboriginal tribe inhabiting the Thana district of Maharashtra adjoining Greater Bombay where they form more than 50% of the population Mrs Parulekar°, is not very precise when she tells us that they number about 2½ lakhs As the book was published first in 1970 presumably she is referring to the 1961 census figures and since the Communist agitation was launched in Umbargao, Dahanu, Palghat and Jawhar taluqs of Thana districts, perhaps the figures refer only to these taluqs A century ago the Warlis were the owners of all land in these tracts But in times of famine and scarcity the lands passed from their hands into those of the moneylenders for trifling amounts There were instances in which acres of land were parted for 5 lbs of grain, in some cases at the rate of Rs 5 per acre, a rupee per acre or even 8 as per acre Mrs Parulekar is quoting from the Report on the aboriginal and hill tribes in Bombay Presidency published in 1939 The Report was compiled by David Symington, an ICS officer specially appointed to enquire into the conditions of these aboriginal tribes in Bombay Presidency She also quotes from the speech of Morarji Desai Revenue and Home Minister in composite Bombay Presidency on 25 September 1939 and from the pamphlet issued by the Adivasi Seva Mandal by its founder member B G Kher on 25 November 1941 (A minor error is that she refers to Kher as the Chief Minister but in 1941 he was no longer so The Congress Ministries had resigned two years before) The main point is that the landowning Warlis had been reduced to the status of landless labourers in the 20th Century The new landlords permitted the Warlis from whom the land was acquired to have a small infertile tract, and in return made them perform agricultural operations without any wages whatsoever Even from the small piece of land which the Warli got as his own

° *Jevhi manus Jasa hoto* (Marathi) by Smt Godavari Parulekar

he had to share half his crop with the landlord in accordance with the agreement In practical terms it was even more than half as the ignorant, illiterate Warli was cheated in measurement of the paddy and in keeping the accounts of the landlord's share The landlords in these taluqs of Thana district were also forest contractors and owners of vast tracts of grass lands Forest cutting and grass-cutting had also to be done by the Warlis without wages Symington described the conditions under which the Warlis worked and lived as 'wretched in the extreme and abuses to which they were subjected as a 'blot on the administration B G Kher said, the fact that such a big mass of humanity should be rotting in a condition of life more debasing than that of slaves within 50 miles from Bombay and that our citizens should be in complete ignorance about their hardships and fortunes is certainly disgraceful'

The manner in which this wageless work was extracted from the Warlis has been described by Mrs Parulekar thus The landlord's agent passed on an iron rod to the villagers under his charge Every member of the household of the Warlis who happened to get this rod from the agent on the previous eve had to carry out whatever work was assigned to him or her the following day Children women old persons sick persons pregnant women or women who had delivered babies recently none was spared from it And if anyone showed the slightest hesitation to do the work that person was dragged out of the hut, beaten up and even tortured if the agent felt like it In return for all the work the household got a measure of paddy which they could pound into rice and eat Quite often the Warlis were whipped for not doing the work properly or going out for drinking water or performing calls of nature during the period of work Other inhuman punishments inflicted on them were to fumigate them so to say over fire in which chillies were burnt and yoking them like bullocks to a plough Symington said about them "If they refused or procrastinated they are liable to assaults and beatings These are common occurrences and are usually carried out by the landlord's local agents "I was told on credible authority ' says Symington, 'of men being tied up to posts and whipped There are also rumours of men in the past having been killed ' Additionally the landlords did not scruple to use their power for gratifying their lust with the tenant's womenfolk A forest contractor who

was also a landlord burnt a Warli to death for not preparing charcoal properly Another Warli who refused to let his wife be abused by the landlord was buried alive

Mrs Parulekar also reports many cases of inhuman fortune, murder and rape What interests me as an archivist is that since these cases were never reported to the police or the Government officials it would be impossible to find any documentary evidence about them The police and the Government officials enjoyed full, free hospitality of the landlords and contractors and never cared to take any action whatsoever on the atrocities perpetrated by the landlords' hired agents upon this helpless tribe

In January 1945 the Communist Party under the leadership of Mrs Godavari Parulekar and her husband Comrade Shamrao Parulekar set up a Maharashtra Prantik (that is provincial) Kisan Sabha which held its first Conference at Titwala very near Kalyan to which they managed to get, with great difficulty the attendance of about 250 Warlis to begin with Thereafter a host of Communist workers descended into this part of Thana district, began to prepare the Warlis to fight against the injustice, held *many meetings and taught them the principles of Communism* In graphic detail Mrs Parulekar has described the miserable living conditions of the Warlis, has contrasted it by sketching the luxurious useless lives of the landlords and forest contractors and enumerated the difficulties encountered by the Communist workers in awakening and partially organising the Warlis against the landlords She has devoted 3 or 4 chapters for this purpose

On 23 May 1945 the Communists organised a peasant conference in Umbargaon taluq which was attended by 5000 Warlis There under Communist inspiration they resolved not to work for the landlords without wages Within three weeks they implemented this resolution in other taluqs They went on a strike, so to say, against wageless work The landlords' answer was that they would not lend paddy during the lean season which they used to do earlier But the Warlis did not yield They held mass meetings and boldly announced their resolve The *Bombay Chronicle* of 22 October 1945 reported "The Adivasis who were tame and docile till this day suddenly became class conscious and they began to collect in large numbers under the Red Flag Mass meetings were held throughout these taluqs People marched miles

and miles to attend meetings They carried sticks in their hands Their enthusiasm appeared unprecedented The result of these meetings was that wageless work came to an end

An ancillary result was that the domestic slavery of the Warlis also got abolished in the same period How this domestic slavery had come into existence has been described in the Thana District Gazetteer "Under Maratha rule the Warlis were the bondsmen of high caste villagers The name of bondage ceased with the British rule but the reality of slavery remained Formerly their masters used to pay their marriage expenses Now they had themselves to find the funds And as almost none of them had the necessary forty or fifty rupees, most of them had to pledge their labour for a term of years This term of years through the Sowcar's carelessness and the lender's craft often developed into lifelong and some time into hereditary servitude If the debtor was slow or recalcitrant in making payments or rendering services he was threatened, assaulted or beaten by the Sowcar's agents often Pathans or Purbias A Warli refusing to work without wages in return for the loan which he had taken was sometimes improperly prosecuted and the Magistrates sentenced them perversely Mrs Parulekar says that the awakened Adivasis went from household to household in large numbers invited the domestic slaves to free themselves and join them and the awe-inspired landlords overwhelmed by these liberators in strength helplessly watched them desert their palatial bungalows She says that the Warlis did this entirely on their own, the credit was due to them and not to the Kisan Sabha

The real clash with the zamindars came about when the Warlis refused to cut grass lands for the amount of 2 as per day or a vesselful of paddy *The Kisan Sabha demanded Rs 2½ for 500* lbs of grass in the forests and Rs 3/- for the same on coast land The zamindars and contractors refused and the Warlis went on a strike The zamindars tried to get some of them put into police custody under trumped up charges But as the strike was peaceful they did not succeed Then they used the device of spreading a false rumour that on 10 October, 1945 Mrs Parulekar was going to address a meeting at a village called Talwada that the goondas of the zamindars were going to disrupt the meeting, her life would be in danger and that every Warli should go to the

meeting to protect her with whatever weapon he might have at hand—axe, stick, sickle, whatever The simple Warlis believed in this rumour and marched to Talwada to protect their leader, sometimes from as far as 40 and 50 miles The zamindars informed the police that a violent mob was gathering Without any provocation or investigation the police ordered firing from the roof of the van which was converted into a sort of armoured car No police were hurt but five Warlis were killed as they steadfastly continued to protect the red flag despite the firing Only when Comrade Randive went to Talwada and requested them to go home quietly they dispersed Meanwhile the Milk Commissioner of Bombay realising that the Warli strike was badly affecting the milk supply of the city requested Mr and Mrs Parulekar to negotiate the terms After the police firing the Collector of Thana District also came to Sanjan to start negotiations The zamindars owning grasslands also were invited by the Collector But since both parties were firm in their approach the negotiations broke down Mr and Mrs Parulekar and some other Communist workers were externed from Thana district But this externment order was not good in law and when challenged had to be withdrawn But the landlords made list of tenants whom they found inconvenient and handed them over to the police for getting them arrested Some Warlis left their hamlets hid themselves in the jungles where they had to go without food for 10 to 12 days at a stretch People were afraid of being arrested if they came forward to disclose their injuries or report on the atrocities perpetrated on them by the police between 15 and 25 October 1945

But the Warlis won a victory in this first round The zamindars after all could not afford to lose crores of rupees by allowing the grasslands to dry up Some of them came down and offered even better terms than what the Warlis had demanded

But this victory of the Warlis was short lived In the next two chapters Mrs Parulekar has described the struggle of the Warlis to get some of their other demands accepted The Warlis had their initial victory even under the Defence of India Section 93 regime of the British They had to face far more oppressive acts of the Government police brutalities and so on under the Congress Raj in 1946 47 Even the military was called to suppress them The Warli demands were simple and just They wanted

Re 1 and as 4 as daily wages for cutting wood They wanted payment for carrying grass and timber logs in their bullock carts They wanted the release of arrested Warlis and withdrawal of externment orders against the Communist leaders The Congress Government regarded acceptance of these demands as surrender to the Communists and therefore resorted to brutal suppression instead Mrs Parulekar quotes *the Times of India* and *the National Standard* of 21st January 1947 in support 'Shri Morarji Desai, Home Minister, made it plain that he would not countenance any compromise which would give full control over the Warlis to the Communists But ultimately the Government had to arrive at a compromise They agreed to the demands regarding wages released a few Warlis but did not withdraw externment orders against the leaders Mrs Parulekar has devoted 2 or 3 chapters to the manner in which the Warlis not only withstood the police brutalities and torture but retaliated with their wonderful guerrilla tactics, even arranged an underground fortnight's tour of the District by Mrs Parulekar while she was still under externment orders I only wish to conclude by saying that this is one of the most valuable sources for Warli agitation of 1945 47 which of course needs to be supplemented with a study of the Government records and newspaper accounts

PEASANT UPRISINGS IN BENGAL (1855 1947)

SUNIL SEN

The disintegration of the peasantry the growth of agricultural labour the poverty of the mass of peasants had become the emerging features of the agrarian system in the nineteenth century On the one hand, owner cultivators were being dispossessed of land on the other, there was the growth of a class of non productive rent receivers that included zamindars and jotedars Since the pace of industrialisation was slow the urban middle classes showed a tendency to acquire landed property the bhadralok jotedar had become a recognisable social category in Bengal who seldom encouraged money rents from the tenants Jute the main commercial crop was grown by scattered small peasants who were compelled to raise loans to provide circulating capital on onerous terms of repayment the system of dadan (advance) had become pervasive in many districts[1] It is not fortuitous that peasant unrest was intense until the end of British rule and peasant revolts flared up in different regions of Bengal Evidence that has accumulated in recent years makes it clear that all categories of peasants were involved in agrarian movements which were directed against feudal exploitation

Over the years there was a great deal of migration of peasants agricultural labourers and artisans to the industrial centres *What is striking is the influx of immigrant labour from 1900 on*wards In Bengal the main streams of immigration flowed from Bihar Orissa Central Provinces and the United Provinces to the metropolitan industrial area from Nepal into Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri and from Chotanagpur to Jalpaiguri the immigrants were concentrated in the industrial centres and towns in West Bengal There is little evidence of the flight of bargadars from West Bengal villages to the industrial centres Despite the growth of towns and industrial centres the pressure on land continued unabated peasants and artisans fall back to land that had become over

crowded This is an important point to understand why the agra rian problem came increasingly to the forefront

Some of the major peasant revolts flared up in Bengal to which we shall presently turn What is worth noting is that the early Congress hardly took any notice of the Kisan During the tumul tous days of the Swadeshi movement there was hardly any attempt to build peasant unions It was in the Gandhi era that the peasants were drawn into the national movement It seems that the peasant movements in the country were stimulated by the general spirit of defiance of the Government generated by the nationalist movements in 1920 and 1930 and also by Gandhi s charisma Barrington Moore suggests that Gandhi adhered to non violence when embarking on peasant mobilisation so that the Indian capitalist class was not alienated from the national move ment* Yet the fact is that politicisation of the scattered dis organised, illiterate peasants began in the Gandhi era Gandhi established direct contact with the peasants as he moved from one village to another in Champaran and Kaira During the Kaira satyagraha Gandhi championed the interests of Patidar ryots there is little evidence to show that the low caste tenants and share-croppers were drawn in the movement

What needs to be noted is that Kaira was in the vortex of dis turbances during the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919 Surely Pati dar support stood the Congress in good stead The Bardoli satya graha (1928) was mainly based on the support of land-owning peasants who demanded suspension of land revenue the tenants who paid rent to the landlords were hardly mobilised Once the path of peasant mobilisation was taken it was difficult to halt as the U P experience shows the rent paying tenants could not be restrained from embarking on a no rent campaign in 1930 31*

We will briefly tell the story of the peasant revolts which indi cate that agrarian discontent had become intense in the second half of the nineteenth century As the official reports show tribal peasants were often involved in militant struggles This was not fortuitous On the one hand tribal jagirdars or tribal chiefs were replaced by non tribal landlords on the other hand tribal peasants were dispossessed of their land and forests that invariably passed to non tribal landowners and moneylenders The *Calcutta Review* wrote on the Santals in 1856 Zamindars

the police the revenue and court amlas have exercised a combin ed system of extortions oppressive exactions forcible disposses sion of property As the story has been told by Dr K K Datta the Santal rebellion of 1855 57 spread to Birbhum Ban kura Singhbhum Hazaribagh Bhagalpur and Monghyr and was directed mainly against the moneylenders thousands of peasants in hundreds of villages held meetings and processions some of the rapacious moneylenders were killed As the Santals were openly at war with our troops to quote the Commissioner of Bhagalpur the revolt took the form of an armed uprising against the British raj it was ruthlessly suppressed

It is not clear whether the rent question stirred the Santals in 1855 56 The rent question came increasingly to the forefront after the Tenancy Act of 1859 was passed The zamindars tried to evade the Act and resort to enhancement of rent and evic tion All the evidence confirms that enhancement of rent pro ceeded rapidly after 1859 It is noteworthy that zamindars show ed a tendency to prevent the growth of a class of occupancy ryots so that their feudal power could remain unimpaired As recent evidence indicates the rent question embittered relations between the Santals and landowning classes and the Santal Parganas were the scene of disturbances b tween 1861 and 1881 The Kherwar movement led by Bhagirath Manjhi wh ch had millenarian over tones reached its peak in the 1870s The Kherwars seemed to have been inspired by a passionate longing for a better world they said 'No human being has cleared or plo ughed land but ourselves and no human being but ourselves has a right to a share of the pro duce' The Kherwar movement which had considerable popu lar support did not grow into a rebellion partly becaus the Go vernment aided by the zamindars took precautionary measures it p tered out in the 1880s[6] In the 1890s a new militant move ment of the Mundas of Chotanagpur flared up under the leader ship of Birsa Munda which was suppressed by the Government

Meanwhile the movement of indigo p asants in Bengal had grown into a revolt that was directed against the British planters The revolt started in Barasat which had been the centre of Faraz disturbances of 1838 by 1860 it had spread to Nadia Jessore Pabna Rajshahi Maldah Faridpur and Murshidabad It seems that all categories of the rural population including zamindars

talukdars, mandals and mahajans were united against the planters Kling describes the form of peasant resistance in this passage 'A regular league was formed against indigo cultivation, oaths were subscribed to by both Hindus and Musalmans Ryots of one village were called upon by beat of drums to assist those of another, and if pressed by planters they were to resist In fact zamindar's lathials often attacked indigo factories, armed peasants proceeded in large bodies to any threatened spot'

A new phase of the revolt began as the planters enhanced rents after the Rent Act of 1859 was passed In a few districts, notably Jessore and Pabna the peasants launched a rent strike against the planter-zamindars The Bengal zamindars who had initially supported the revolt 'started immediately to decelerate on their collision course' Predictably the zamindars and moneylenders were not anxious to give their blessings to the rent strikes

The rent disturbances, though localised in a few areas, continued unabated after 1860 and snowballed into an uprising in Pabna in 1873, where an agrarian league was formed and ryots refused to pay rent to the zamindars Between 1870 and 1885 rent disturbances occurred in Dacca Mymensingh Tripura, Backarganj, Faridpur, Bograh and Rajshahi[10] Bagal has told us that 'ryot Sabhas sprang up in the Bengal districts during 1880-85 which held meetings not only in villages but also in Calcutta. The rent question had come to the forefront, the Government did not fail to read the signs and tenancy legislation was undertaken The Bengal Tenancy Act (1885) benefited the ryot who could be a settled ryot if he held any land in the village for twelve years There was no provision in this Act for treating bargadars as tenants The bargadars continued to pay 50 per cent of gross produce as rent and did not enjoy occupancy right

Between 1885 and 1945 there was not a single peasant uprising in Bengal which is a bit surprising as peasant discontent continued to be intense During the Swadeshi movement rural Bengal was quiet In the 1920s the Congress embarked upon peasant mobilisation but hardly launched a no rent campaign When the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1928 was being discussed in the Council the Swarajists stubbornly adopted a pro jotedar position, Azizul Huq's motion proposing two thirds share of the crop to the bargadars was lost thanks to the opposition of the Swarajists Gal-

lagher tells the story of the decline of the Congress in the 1940s when the rural base was shaken with the alienation of Muslims and Namasudras in East Bengal, the decline of the Congress seemed inevitable as it failed to cope with peasant unrest that became acute with the onset of the Great Depression from 1930 onwards In 1930-31 the Congress in U P led a no rent campaign which was suppressed by the Government In Bengal the Congress did not go beyond a no tax campaign, and it was not fortuitous that the mass contact programme" of the 1930s proved ineffective Midnapur was an exception, in this district, as in Kaira in Gujarat the Congress had considerable peasant support [11]

In this period the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti which was formed in 1929 and changed its name to Krishak Praja Party (KPP) in 1936 embarked upon peasant mobilisation, published a weekly, the *Krishak* in 1937, and raised the demand for the abolition of the zamindari system Broadly speaking the KPP based on rich peasants and jotedars tried to organise all categories of peasants in East Bengal districts It is noteworthy that the KPP despite its militant stance did not launch a no rent campaign and began to disintegrate from 1939 onwards most of the KPP stalwarts chose to join the Muslim League which hardly formulated any agrarian programme [1] The steady growth of communalism in Bengal from 1936 onwards surely impeded the growth of the peasant movement and culminated in communal riots following on the Calcutta killing on 16 August 1946

At this point we turn to the activities of the Workers' and Peasants' Party (1926 28) which sought to build a secular movement and bring radical ideas among the peasant masses The Workers and Peasants' Party took the initiative in holding an all Bengal Peasant Conference in Nadia in February 1926 which formulated the immediate demands of the peasantry e g permanency in the tenure of land cultivated by the tenants reduction of the rate of interest charged by moneylenders remunerative price for jute growers, the Party published *Langal* and *Ganavani* to focus attention on the agrarian problem We do not know how many Kisan Sabhas were actually formed in the villages or whether the Sabhas proved to be enduring organisations As Dr Adhikari points out the Workers' and Peasants' Party could make a small beginning of a radical agitation among the peasants which hardly grew into a movement [1]

When the national movement found itself in an impasse with the collapse of the Civil Disobedience movement in 1934 the horizon began to light up as peasant movements began to grow in different parts of the country The climate of public opinion was changing At Faizpur the Congress adopted an agrarian programme that included reduction of rent and revenue abolition of feudal dues fixity of tenure and moratorium on debts It is noteworthy that the demand for the abolition of zamindary system which was included in the agrarian resolution drafted by Jawahar lal Nehru had to be withdrawn at the Lucknow Congress (1936) Nevertheless peasant discontent could not be ignored by the political parties The All India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936 which organised partial struggles focussing on the demands of rent paying tenants The zamindars who had rallied round the Congress did not fail to launch a pressure campaign against the Kisan Sabha Referring to the activities of the Kisan Sabha in 1937 the Intelligence Bureau noted Right wing Congress leaders have strongly criticised any suggestion of such an independent organisation as jeopardising the whole Congress Organisation " Predictably the movements organised by the Kisan Sabha were often faced with the opposition of right wing Congress leaders

In Bengal the Communists took the lead in organising the Provincial Kisan Sabha as a branch of the AIKS which held its first session at Bankura in March 1937 Within a year Kisan Sabha units were formed in the districts In 1937 it had only 11 000 members with organisation improving the membership rose to 1 78 000 in 1944 2 55 000 in 1945 2 03 382 in 1947 In the 1940s about one thousand full time activists that included intellectuals and peasants worked in the districts they were apparently the core of the Kisan Sabha

In the winter of 1946 the Tebhaga struggle erupted like a volcano The Kisan Sabha linked the Tebhaga movement with the demand for the abolition of zamindari and the vesting of land with the tiller By the middle of December 1946 the struggle spread to 19 districts and was intense in Dinajpur Rangpur Jalpaiguri Khulna Jessore 24 Parganas and Midnapur Almost simultaneously the Hajong peasants launched the Tanka movement in north Mymensingh demanding reduction of tanka rent and its conversion into money rent On 4 January 1947 there was

a clash between the peasants and police at Churirbandar in Dinajpur district in which two peasants and a policeman were killed On 30 January there was a real battle between the Hajong peasants and the police at Bahrtali in Mymensingh district, in which two Hajongs and two policemen were killed On 20 February 1947 as the police party went to Khanpur in Dinajpur district an alarm was sounded by the beating of drums, the police truck, which fell into a ditch cut by the peasants in the middle of the road, was attacked, Santal Muslim and Rajbangsi peasants fought with whatever arms they could collect, 20 peasants including two women were killed in police firing and hundreds were wounded On 21 February another peasant-police clash was reported in Thumnia in Dinajpur district, in which four Rajbangsi peasants were killed On 25 February the Kisan Sabha organised a big demonstration in Thakurgaon town in Dinajpur the police opened fire and five peasants were killed On 28 February Suhrawardy referred to the forms of peasant struggle in his Assembly speech 'Lands are being cultivated by force Committees of action volunteer corps propaganda leaflets, secret shelters have been organised Badges and lathis have been issued and the volunteers are taught to drill and parade" On 1 March 1947 there was a clash between Oraon peasants and the police in the Duars in Jalpaiguri district, in which five peasants were killed On 4 April another clash occurred at Meteli in this district, in which nine peasants were killed In Mymensingh the Tanka movement was continuing and most of the leaders including Moni Singh managed to remain in hiding, the men took to the hills during the day and returned to their villages at night According to the report of the AIKS there were 3 119 arrests, 50 peasants were killed in police firing women were raped in 24 Parganas, Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Mymensingh[1]

Meanwhile the situation had changed On the afternoon of 27 March there was a fresh flare up of communal killings in Calcutta, and troops had to be called out next day The Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress which had earlier issued the call of a general strike on 28th March decided to withdraw it Mr. Alavi writes on this phase of the agrarian movement "With the approach of independence the full force of Muslim nationalism was sweeping through Bengal This tended to isolate the Hindu cadres"[1] It is not clear what Alavi means by 'Muslim

nationalism It would be more correct to say that a wave of communalism fomented by the Muslim National Guard and the RSS was sweeping the country In Bengal communal riots that began on 21 March continued almost without any break up to the day before independence and the agrarian movement rapidly disintegrated

Recent research indicates that there was as Stokes tells us 'a groundswell coming up from within peasant society which was decisive in loosening the political hold of colonial rule and promoting the nationalist cause [17] Over the years the ruling class had dealt with the urban politician and become familiar with the rules of the game As thousands of peasants in hundreds of villages were politicised and drawn in the anti imperialist movement the ruling class was faced with the dilemma of choice What needs to be noted is that the Congress which came to be dominated by landlords hardly gave its blessing to the developing peasant struggles from 1936 onwards The negative attitude of the nationalist leadership tended to weaken the anti imperialist movement during the last phase of the colonial rule Looking back one may say that the agrarian movement in Bengal though exposed to the full force of governmental repression regrouped its forces and heralded the growth of the independent power of the Communists in the countryside This became evident as time passed

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LAST BATTLE OF BENGAL PEASANTS UNDER BRITISH RULE

ABANI LAHIRI

The peasantry of Bengal fought the last battle under British Rule in India right in the middle of a countrywide communal war unleashed in August 1946 at Calcutta and Noakhali. It was the mass peasant upheaval for Tebhaga in which Hindu, Muslim and Tribal peasants unitedly raised the banner of revolt against feudal exploitation in nineteen districts of Bengal immediately after the ghastly communal killings in Calcutta Noakhali and Saidpur (Rangpur)

The devastating Bengal Famine in 1943 took a toll of about 3 5 million lives It was a man made famine created by the war time needs of British rulers and the unbridled greed of their lackeys—the jotedars and the new class of black marketeers born during the war years The British rulers after the loss of Burma and its food and oil to the Japanese with inhuman disregard for the life of the people cornered the bulk of the foodgrains for their pressing war needs The jotedars and black marketeers hoarded the remaining foodgrains By May 1943 foodgrains had almost disappeared from rural markets of Bengal Lakhs of starving peasants could only see the big storehouses of jotedars shifting foodgrains to the black marketeers at fantastic profit

The peasants' skirmishes with the jotedars started at this stage The Kisan Sabha had called for a mass anti hoarding drive and the pattern of this struggle for food was more or less simular in rural Bengal The hungry peasants marching under the Red Flag of the Kisan Sabha surrounded the jotedars' 'gola' or the traders godown and demanded the distribution of hoarded foodgrains on loan basis or at control rate There were large number of incidents in Dinajpur Rangpur, Jalpaiguri Jessore and Mymensingh where on the jotedars refusing to give food loans the peasants seized the foodgrains and distributed the same after preparing a list of the

beneficiaries and the quantity of grains given to each The next development which came almost unfailingly was for the jotedars to go to the police or the criminal courts to file complaints about Kisan Sabha resorting to 'organised looting of foodgrains and other properties' belonging to them Police would come to the village with summons either the wanted persons were not traceable or criminal courts' notices were served The annual Organisational Report accepted by the State Kisan Conference at Nalitabari, Mymensingh in May 1943 noted 'in every district our workers are facing police offensives the scope for organising meetings and processions are becoming less Civil Liberty has become an empty word One handicap of the jotedars was their inability to freely use the village Food Committees at least in the organised areas as a large number of them were controlled by the Kisan Sabha activists Kisan Sabha organised famine relief work including running of free food kitchens in cooperation with other people's organisation

These Food Committees which were set up by the Government as instruments to pacify the village poor in conditions of acute distress turned out otherwise Large number of village Food Committees in unorganised areas were captured by the jotedars and black-marketeers and virtually became instruments to cover the anti-people activities of the rural vested interests But in the organised peasant areas, large number of Food Committees were taken over by the cadres of Kisan Sabha and became instruments of struggle against the hoarders and black-marketeers for food and relief This was a very valuable exposure for the peasant cadres for the future battles against the same enemies after another three years under the banner of "Tebhaga Chai"

During these famine days the organised kisans learnt three valuable lessons through their own experience Firstly, they saw the strength of mass action and the role of kisan volunteers in dehoarding food from the godowns of jotedars and black-marketeers Secondly they saw the role of the Red Flag and the Communist Party of India as selfless organisers of the struggle for food and relief Thirdly, all their illusions about the village rich were shattered and they could see the link between jotedars black-marketeers and the police

This experience gained through the battle for food was an im-

portant factor to bring the sweep and the militancy during the Tebhaga movement in 1947

The call for Tebhaga (sharing the produce on two thirds and one third basis instead of half half between the sharecropper and the land owner) was first given in the resolution adopted in the Fourth Provincial Kisan Conference held at Panjia, Jessore in June 1940 This slogan was derived from the report of the Floud Commission submitted to the Government in March 1940 in which it recommended inter alia that the sharecroppers should be made to pay not more than one-third of the produce to the owner of the land

After Panjia Conference the spread of the World War and the devastating famine in Bengal somewhat changed the landscape and brought new priorities before the kisan movement The struggle for Tebhaga virtually went out of the agenda during the period of war Even in the Ninth Provincial Kisan Conference held at Maubhog, Khulna in mid May 1946 a full one year after the end of the war, no serious call for launching the Tebhaga struggle was given

It is very relevant to remember the fast development of a revolutionary situation in India immediately after the military defeat of fascist Germany and Japan in May 1945 In fact national liberation struggle had started sweeping the entire colonial world In September 1945 Calcutta Tramways workers went on a prolonged strike November 1945 saw a massive struggle for the release of INA prisoners On 22nd November the working class of Calcutta and the industrial belt went on a general strike in support of the students squatting on Dharmatala Street (now Lenin Sarani) face to face with the armed mounted troops when they were prevented from marching to Dalhousie Square Even the Muslim League students came with their own flag to participate in this struggle The harvesting season had just begun But there was no call to the peasants to launch their struggle for Tebhaga In February 1946 before the end of the harvesting season, the struggle took another revolutionary turn Demanding release of Captain Rashid Ali of the INA the students youth and urban poor raised barricades on the streets of Calcutta to fight the British Armed Forces The situation took a drastic revolutionary turn The working class went on a general strike in support of the students According to the confidential report

sent to the Viceroy by the Military Intelligence Department on 13th February 1946, "The Army is patrolling the city, Green Howards' Regiment has taken up North Calcutta, Yorks and Lancashire Infantry are patrolling Central Calcutta and Gurkha Rifles are posted in South Calcutta Barricades have come up in important thoroughfares Military Transports are put on fire Chowringhee area is littered with dead bodies In fact we have lost control of North Calcutta" (Quoted by Prof G Chattopadhyaya in *History of Student Movement in Bengal*) Within a week, on 18th February 1946 came the biggest postwar revolutionary action for Independence The Indian Ratings of the Royal Indian Navy raised the banner of revolt and mounted their guns on the British troops Like a wild fire, the revolt spread to Karachi, Madras Cochin and Calcutta The Air Force was restive Against the threat of the British commander to wipe out the Indian Navy the working class of Bombay went on a general strike and erected barricades on the streets About 200 of them died fighting the British Armed Forces on the streets of Bombay One of the very important points to note was that none of these postwar struggles was launched under the leadership or with the approval of Indian National Congress In most cases, they were against it

This was February 1946 The sharing of paddy was not yet over But no call was given to the peasant to launch their struggle Was it that the situation in Bengal countryside was not favourable for such a struggle?

The after effects of war and famine on the village poor were devastating The sale of agricultural land usually took place every year In 1939, land sales according to registered deeds numbered 13,13 319 for the whole of Bengal In the famine year of 1943 the number of land sale went up to 35 40,455 A large part of this additional 22 lakhs land transfers was from the famine stricken poor and middle peasants to the village rich In some areas like Nilphamari of Rangpur district a storm centre of the Tebhaga movement, the increase in land transfer was about 1000 per cent In Dinajpur district the increase was more than 150 per cent in 1943 compared to that in 1939 According to the enquiry conducted by the Indian Statistical Institute in collaboration with Prof K P Chattopadhyaya, sponsored by the Revenue Department, Government of Bengal, during the famine

2 59 300 families sold their land totally of whom 62,000 were marginal peasants with nine to fifteen bighas of cultivable land,
5,71,500 families sold their land partially, and
5 10 600 families were forced to mortgage their lands with the money lenders and rich peasants

Thus the transfer of cultivable land during 1943 was about 14 per cent of the total cultivable land in Bengal Moreover ' in 1943, 3 06,000 families lost 11 47,000 plough cattles as a result of famine Out of this 8 90 000 plough cattles were lost by the poor peasants and landless labourers' (*Memorandum of Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha to Government of Bengal on Rehabilitation* October 1945) On a conservative estimate the famine left about two millions of marginal and poor peasants and their families as landless rural proletariat making a big potential base for militant kisan struggle while land and its produce were still more concentrated in the hands of rich peasants, traders and money lenders This development added a new revolutionary dimension to the postwar agrarian situation in Bengal giving the Tebhaga movement its militant sweep

The aftermath of the situation continued after the war which was also timely noted by the Kisan Sabha We may refer to two resolutions adopted in 1945 In a resolution passed by the first meeting of the Central Kisan Council after the war held on 7th September 1945 it was noted 'There has been a terrible flood in the East and North Bengal which has affected about 7000 villages in 500 unions of eight districts of North and East Bengal About six million people have been affected by this devastating flood Rice completely disappeared from some markets for some days and in some places half naked hungry people have again started crowding the towns'

The All Bengal Conference for Food Cloth and Rehabilitation was held on 7th October 1945 at Wellington Square under the Chairmanship of the Mayor of Calcutta In its resolution on Food Crisis it said 'During the last famine the peasants have lost large part of their lands, ploughs cattles and other implements for cultivation As a result cultivation of land was in deep crisis Over and above, this year's drought condition till August followed by flood in North and East Bengal had created a very serious situation. According to Bengal Government this year s *Aus* crop would

be only 75 per cent and *Aman* crop only 60 per cent of the normal The Rice Mill Association issued a statement that *Aus* and *Aman* would not be more than 60 per cent and 50 per cent respectively of the normal Extensive starvation had already started amongst the poor both in the town and countryside Price of paddy and rice is fast going up in all the districts Spontaneous hunger marches of the village poor to the towns have already started ' It was pointed out that the last famine 'had left the deadweight of six millions of pauperised and semidestitute people on the shattered economic and social structure of Bengal' The overall situation in the countryside of Bengal was quite desperate when the naval ratings the workers students and urban poor were being swept by a countrywide militant anti imperialist upsurge But somehow the peasants of Bengal were not in the battlefield The Central Committee of the CPI in its resolution "Forward to Final Struggle' adopted on 5th August 1946 noted ' The peasantry is lagging behind the working class in this phase of national mass upheavals

Just before the end of the war the Eighth Conference of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha met at Hatgovindapur in Burdwan in March 1945 A resolution was passed reiterating the principle of Tebhaga and asking for bringing down the rate of interest on paddy loans to the sharecroppers and landless peasants There was no call to start the struggle for Tebhaga from the next harvesting season The Ninth Provincial Kisan Conference met at Maubhog Khulna in May 1946 It was full one year after the end of the war But this Conference also did not call the peasants to the battle A Rasul wrote in his *History of Kisan Sabha* that "the Provincial Kisan Sabha leadership at that time committed mistake in understanding the explosive situation They could not correctly assess the extent of its militant potentiality"

Perhaps this was an understatement The lessons of earlier peasant revolts clearly show how the dispossessed humiliated rural masses torn asunder by famines repeatedly rose in revolt against their oppressors The establishment of British rule in Bengal was quickly followed by the great Bengal famine of 1770 in which fifteen million poor peasants and artisans died The wave of Sanyasi-Fakir rebellion received one of its powerful impetus from the aftermath of this holocaust 'The worst occurred between 1865 and 1899 and the most severe of all in 1896 97 when millions

were seriously affected and at least 4 5 millions died I have calculated a total of 20,687,000 famine deaths in India between 1866 and 1943 (*Indian Peasant Uprising* Kathleen Gough)

By the compulsion of social forces the dispossessed peasants of Bengal in the post 1943 famine period were destined to rise in a powerful upsurge If earlier they rose against the oppressors without having their class organisation, Red Flag and the Communist Party, and a national revolutionary temper amongst all sections of people, there was no doubt that the rural poor in Bengal would rise again particularly with the anti imperialist upsurge of other classes sweeping the urban areas Particularly, the food grain production in Bengal for two consecutive years 1944 45 and 1945 46 was very bad The main Kharif crop *Aman* in 1945-46 was only 50% to 60% of normal production Understandably the question of higher share of the produce was very vital for the sharecroppers in 1945-46

It was the Bengal Kisan Council meeting in September 1946 which took the final decision to start the Tebhaga movement from the next harvest I shall not try to give descriptive details of the Tebhaga struggle The heroism and self-sacrifice of the poor peasants and landless labourers in face of the brutal repression by the Government supported by the landed interests both in National Congress and Muslim League had now become a part of history

The Tebhaga struggle lasted for about six months excepting in Kakdwip area where it continued up to 1948 The struggle started with small skirmishes in October-November 1946 in Mymensingh Khulna, Dinajpore and Rangpur but acquired a new sweep with the beginning of harvesting in December 1946 January 1947 In January February 1947, it started sweeping rural Bengal like a tidal wave drawing six million poor peasants and landless labourers into its orbit At the crest of the struggle not less than one hundred thousand Kisan volunteers armed with the lathis were marching in the villages with Red Flags Hundreds of jotedars started leaving their villages to the subdivisional and district towns About two thousand peasants and agricultural labourers became almost wholetime organisers of the struggle moving from village to village A large number of them consisted of youth and women There were large number of clashes with the

landlords and the armed police Seventy kisan workers including 25 women were killed in the clashes, about 350 were seriously injured and 5000 kisan workers were arrested The struggle virtually ended by April 1947 A serious and in depth appraisal of the lessons of this great mass movement has never been made The following points may be underlined in this connection

a) It was the biggest struggle in the history of Bengal not only because of the six million participants in nineteen districts of the state but also because it drew in its tidal wave the poorest of the villages who never had thought of any mass movement for the fulfilment of their demands The Tenth Provincial Kisan Conference held in Midnapore in February 1947 in its resolution on 'Abolish Landlordism' said "out of those who are actually engaged in cultivation 41 per cent are depending mainly on sharecropping, 25 per cent are landless labourers and the remaining 34 per cent are owning land Only 8 per cent of them are having land more than 5 acres' No wonder that for the first time Tebhaga struggle built the basis of a revolutionary alliance of 92 per cent of the marginal, poor and landless working peasants in extensive areas of Bengal

b) The large-scale participation of the agricultural labourers and women added a new revolutionary dimension Militant leaders of the struggle like Chharshai Sheikh Shibram and Samiruddin were landless labourers having nothing to gain from Tebhaga struggle Chharshai was a landless labourer employed by Singhabahini Estate on a monthly wage Shibram and Samiruddin were day labourers working on daily wage on jotedar's land From the viewpoint of the present atmosphere of economic trade unionism they had no interest in the sharing of the produce as they had nothing to share But when the poor sharecroppers rose in revolt, they led the struggle in Khanpur and Chiribandar They were not exceptions Anyone remembering those stormy days will certainly remember hundreds of such landless workers leading the Tebhaga struggle This was the upsurge of revolutionary democracy in rural Bengal Manikrishna Sen one of the leaders of Tebhaga struggle in Rangpur painted an unforgetable picture "Jotedars started fleeing the village The landowner Ramesh was quitely leaving His bonded labour, Gana climbed a big tree and was looking to the desertion of his employer landlord So long he saw the dispossesed kisans leaving the village

with their families for jobs in the tea gardens With his heart full of joy Gana was singing Ramesh goes into wilderness with his wife Now is the time for Gana to find a wife and settle down with his family This feature of the involvement of land less labourers in spite of no demand like minimum wage being a part of the platform had far reaching implications

c) The movement can be divided into three phases In the first phase, from the Kisan Council meeting in September 1946 to actual launching of the struggle the movement was limited within the organised peasant bases only The slogan was to collectively harvest the paddy to ward off landlord offensive and take the crop to the sharecroppers 'kholan' for thrashing and sharing This phase continued up to 22nd January 1947 when Bengal Bargadar Temporary Regulation Bill was published in the Calcutta Gazette

The second phase of the movement extended from 22nd January 1947 to the first week of March 1947 During this period the struggle spread to new and unorganised areas hitherto not in contact with Kisan Sabha In most of these areas the crop was already harvested and as usual taken to jotedar's store house for thrashing and sharing Meanwhile the news of kisans organised under the Red Flag collectively harvesting and taking the crop to their own kholan spread far and wide The kisans were restive Control on harvested paddy became the central issue This might be a big factor in outright abolition of all 'abwabs At this juncture came the news of Tebhaga being enacted into law This broke the last hesitation and groups of militant kisans from distant and unorganised villages started contacting the 'Red Flags' for 'permission' to seize paddy from jotedar's kholan With large number of jotedars leaving the villages for safety' in the towns it appeared as if in the villages the power had passed to the Kisan Committees They were told to recruit one Kisan Sabha member, one volunteer with lathi and raise a subscription of one rupee from each family of the village The conditions were sometimes fulfilled within 24 hours when they came back with a list of newly enrolled members and volunteers and the fund collected This was the period when the peasants who had earlier taken the harvest to the jotedar's kholan again surrounded their store houses seized paddy and carried it to their own kholan' or Panchayat 'kholan This was the period when a big row was rais

ed by the landed interest on the communists looting the harvest'. Hundreds of telegrams and representations were sent by Hindu and Muslim jotedars to the Government demanding repressive actions against the kisans Congress and League MLAs united to pressurise the Government to withdraw the Bargadar Bill This phase ended with the joint rally of sharecroppers tea garden workers and railway employees at Domohini Duars This high tide of the movement showed militant kisans forging links with the working class The third phase started with the shelving of the Bargadar Bill and the armed offensive by the Government Hundreds of police camps were opened in the villages and a virtual war was declared against the kisans There were 35 armed police camps in the villages of Dinajpur district alone It started with the Khanpur firing on 20th February 1947 when 22 militant kisans including their leader Chiarshu Sheikh were killed

During the last phase there was also a cry by the militant kisans for arms to fight back the armed offensive of the police After the firing on the peaceful protest demonstration by kisans at Thakurgoan on 25th February 1947 killing four kisan workers the militants came to the underground centre in the village to demand arms But nothing could be done The movement started receding The last glorious battle was fought in April 1947 in the Duars when the sharecroppers and tea garden labourers unitedly faced the police bullets and became martyrs

It was the eternal shame for the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League leaders that they were united but on the other side of the barricade N K Kundu the top Congress and subsequently the Forward block leader of Dinajpore led the 'jotedars delegation to the Government demanding action against the kisans

d) There was a serious realisation amongst the leadership of the struggle of the failure to mobilise the support and sympathy of other democratic sections of the people This had helped to isolate the struggling kisans in the face of massive state repression This was no doubt a major failure Not to speak of the democratic middle class even the militant working class in railways tramways engineering or jute did not send a single fraternal delegation to the fighting peasants The support from the tea garden workers in Duars or the visit of a student or Relief Squad in the last phase of the struggle did not change the picture

But a basic point is to be noted in this connection When the workers RIN Ratings, students, employees and the town poor were fighting the battles against British Government in the streets from September 1945 to 29th July 1946 the peasants were not called upon to join the battle by launching their struggle for Tebhaga Thus would have built up the revolutionary bond of fraternity between the workers peasants armed forces and other democratic masses in villages and towns Explaining the peasants demands to other democratic sections was a very important talks But revolutionary class alliance was not built through explanatory campaigns alone It was necessary to have the experience of common struggle If six million peasants had started their struggle in 1945 harvesting season for which the objective condition was as favourable as in 1946, its tidal sweep would have coincided with the revolt of the RIN ratings and the barricade fights on the streets of Calcutta The poor and landless peasants of Bengal missed this opportunity They entered the battlefield when the battles unleashed by their potential allies had been over and the imperialists communalists and compromisers threatened by the revolutionary post-war upsurge, had created a situation of widespread communal blood-bath

It is now idle to speculate what would have been the impact of this mass Kisan upsurge at the end of 1945 Some leaders said that it would have met with the same fate since the dominant leadership of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League had already decided to strike a compromise with imperialism Others said that this upsurge might have made the compromise impossible by forging an unity for struggle and thus isolating the compromising leadership Not a single post war struggle was fought under the banner of Congress or Muslim League So the possibility of a combined upsurge foiling the efforts of the communalists may not be ruled out To quote the words of a member of the Central Strike Committee of RIN describing the situation on 19th February 1946 at Bombay "But had we tried to join the workers we were certain we would have been blown to bits The British were not bluffing That was clear enough The streets were patrolled by tank regiments But the fact was that if only we decided to break out of the barracks to fight it out, the chances of further bargaining between

the British and Indian politicians would also have been blown away along with us (*Mutiny of the Innocents*, B C Dutt)

e) There were differences of opinion on the correctness of the slogan of seizing harvested paddy from the jotedar's store house and taking them to the kisans 'kholan' Some thought that it was an adventurist slogan inviting ruthless police repression It was forgotten that when the armed forces opened fire in Chirirbandar on 4th January 1947 the sharecroppers were only in the stage of harvesting and there was not a single case of seizure of paddy stocks of jotedars The fact was that this slogan and its implementation by armed peasant masses raised the struggle to a new revolutionary stage It was another matter that it could not develop further under the then existing atmosphere of communal riot and impending partition

In conclusion, it may be underlined that in spite of the delay in the launching of the Tebhaga struggle by one harvesting year, in spite of the lapses in the organisation of the struggle and more so in spite of the wave of communal riots raging in Bengal the village poor fought the most glorious mass battles in 1946-47 Equally so, in spite of the weakness of the leadership, the Communists and Kisan Sabha workers led this biggest revolutionary battle of sharecroppers and landless labourers in Bengal with revolutionary courage, determination and self sacrifice

The lessons of the struggle are still to be drawn Agrarian revolution in future will have to appraise and assimilate these lessons for its ultimate success

INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES ABROAD BEFORE 1914

HORST KRUGER

At the beginning of the twentieth century centres of Indian national revolutionary movement emerged in England, France, North America and Japan. The genesis of these centres owed itself to various factors. Some of the Indians living abroad were seized by the general upsurge of the national liberation movement in India and deeply influenced by the process of political and ideological radicalization which took place during the Swadeshi days. First of all Shyamji Krishnavarma[1] is to be mentioned here who was called the father of the Indian revolutionary movement abroad by the chief of the British political police in India[2].

He began to publish the journal *The Indian Sociologist* in London in 1905, founded the Indian Home Rule Society and created by opening the India House the organisational and material preconditions for the emergence of a revolutionary centre in London.

Revolutionary groups in India also sent members abroad for political work.

Another cause for political emigration was the fact that the repressive measures of the British colonial government prevented practically any further political activities by the radical forces in India. Finally the stipendiaries of the fellowships donated by Krishnavarma and others in London are to be mentioned here. These students came from the most active groups of the national-revolutionary movement in India.

These sections forming the nucleus of the national revolutionary movement abroad have an interesting social composition. The majority was formed by young intellectuals who either had their own financial means or received stipends. Some of them also tried to make both ends meet by doing journalistic work, giving lessons in languages etc. The other material prerequisites which made political work possible were provided by individual

representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie But this does not mean that the Indian bourgeoisie as a class supported the revolutionary activities

A peculiar situation developed in the United States of America and in Canada Here, the phase when only small revolutionary groups of intellectuals were active lasted only a short while Instead of this a revolutionary mass movement came up which had its social basis in several thousands of Indian immigrants working as labourers in industry and agriculture and which was formed into the Ghadar Party in 1913 The political work of that Party was financed by the fees and donations of the members Compared to this mass organisation the national-revolutionary groups in London Paris and Tokyo remained numerically small[3] It is obvious that the different social composition of the groups or movements abroad influenced the methods of their struggle The major objective was the same for all—the winning of complete independence of India

Between the national revolutionary groups abroad and leaders of the radical wing of the national liberation movement existed numerous direct relations Apart from these direct contacts pamphlets, leaflets journals and articles published by the emigrant patriots found a lively response in the Indian national press There were manifold forms of contact with and of support for the revolutionary forces in India

The national revolutionary groups abroad published their literature first of all with intention to become effective in India But besides that their foreign propaganda still had an additional function Spreading information on the real conditions under colonial rule in India it counteracted to some extent the pro imperialist news issued by the British Reuter Agency

In Europe and in the United States the Indian nationalists were confronted with the social and political conditions which were much more advanced than those in India These were independent highly developed industrialized capitalist states with republican constitutions and parliaments The bourgeois democratic conditions made it possible for the masses to fight more effectively for progress The political and intellectual life was lively many sided and progressive allowing public discussion of advanced social and political theories and views This entire

spectrum of social conditions existing then in Europe and in America made a lasting impact on the Indians coming from a co onially oppressed country

The contact with progressive ideas and social conceptions existing in foreign countries was of great importance for the Indian nationalists as also for the participants in the national and social liberation movements of other peoples This does not mean however, that the progressive ideas were adopted immediately and mechanically by the leaders and members of the Indian liberation movement There were many obstacles—the inadequate level of the socio economic and political development, the predominance of pre capitalist relations of production and based on this the general existence of traditional mentalities and modes of acting, the general backwardness of the masses, the resistance of the indigenous exploiting classes and, last but not least, the imperialist colonial power The adoption and the diffusion of progressive ideas in India proved rather a protracted and complicated process Already since the beginning of the 19th century liberal and radical ideas were spreading among the intelligentsia through English education, towards the end of the century socialist thoughts were added The accelerated adoption of progressive views by the Indian national liberation movement since the beginning of the twentieth century was connected with the work of the national-revolutionary centres abroad

The process of political awakening under the influence of advanced social conditions can be observed in the members of the Ghadar Party Already in 1909 the journal *Free Hindustan* published in the USA reported Coming in contact with free people and institutions of free nations some of the Sikhs[4] though labourers in the North American Continent have assimilated the idea of liberty and trampled the medals of Slavery" Har Dayal who later became the General Secretary of the Ghadar Party wrote about his countrymen in 1911 that they had come to America as timid shabby and ignorant peasants but that they had lost here "cowardice, servility, pessimism and indifference"[5] This process of ideological influence, however was limited in its extent by the fact that these were imperialist states where bourgeois democracy in its various shades gave a larger political scope but at the same time the limitations of freedom existing in the capitalist society also became visible Not by accident were the Indian nationalists

living in West Europe and in the USA confronted with these limitations

An important aspect of the ideological development taking place abroad was that the great majority of Indian national revolutionaries living in foreign countries developed a secular outlook which implied the discontinuance of religious prejudices[7] and the disappearance of casteism[8]

In Great Britain France and in the United States already a strong socialist workingclass movement existed at the turn of the century which had rich experiences in the struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation But the different socialist parties in these countries were ideologically not homogeneous Alongside the revolutionary forces which had adopted the theory of scientific socialism and which endeavoured to apply these ideas to the practice of class struggle there were strong largely predominating forces of reformism and revisionism within the working class movement of those countries The various political ideological positions of the revolutionary and of the reformist forces were reflected also in their attitude towards the colonial question For the Indian national liberation movement the position of international workingclass movement towards the colonial problem formed the point of contact between both movements of emancipation For the workingclass movement on the other hand the struggle against colonialism was an essential part of the more comprehensive movement for the downfall of the capitalist system of exploitation and was therefore subordinated to the revolutionary global strategy As a result there arose a process of contact and cooperation between both movements The Indian nationalists regarded the socialist workingclass movement first of all and either partially or exclusively as a political force which contrary to the conservatives and the liberals supported on principle the national liberation struggle of the colonially oppressed and dependent peoples Out of this common interest resting upon objective conditions there emerged the possibility of co operation and of the subsequent alliance against the common enemy—imperialism But as for the process of reception and diffusion of socialist ideas this took place very slowly and hesitatingly limited to partial aspects and entirely depending on the social development in India and its interaction with the requirements of the national liberation struggle

The first contacts between Indian nationalists and the British workingclass movement can be seen already in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[9] The political activities of Shyamji Krishnavarma in England were closely related to the socialist movement and were unthinkable without the latter. His close relations with H. M. Hyndman[10] must be mentioned here. In spite of certain negative aspects peculiar to Hyndman's political-ideological attitude[11] his great activity in the struggle against imperialist colonial policy has to be emphasized here. Lenin called him in 1911 'a determined enemy of British imperialism' who carried on from 1878 'a noble campaign of exposure against the shameful acts of violence, outrage, plunder, and indignity' by British colonialism in India.[12]

When the Indian Home Rule Society had been founded in London in February 1905, Shyamji Krishnavarma said in an article hinting at Hyndman that the new Society was "the outcome of a suggestion made by a high-minded English gentleman, who has devoted a lifetime to the study of India, and whom all cultured and patriotic Indians *regard* as the champion of their *rights*."[13] Only a few months later Hyndman delivered the inaugural speech at the opening of the India House saying that 'loyalty to Great Britain means treachery to India'.[14] Henceforth Hyndman had close relations with the India House which rapidly became a centre of the revolutionary trend of the Indian national liberation movement in England. He also participated in meetings held at that place. Henceforth Krishnavarma's contacts with the British workingclass movement were widened beyond the S. D. F. comprising also the trade unions and the Labour Party.

Krishnavarma was a representative of the rising Indian bourgeoisie. His radical nationalist opinions are understandable for that reason. But how can his close relations with the socialist workingclass movement be explained? The answer is given by Krishnavarma himself in an interview published by Jean Longuet, grandson of Karl Marx and leading French socialist, in the newspaper *L'Humanité* in 1909. Longuet put the question: 'Our comrade Hyndman at the time of your arrival in Paris apprised us of all his sympathy with you and your work. However are you not irreconcilably hostile to all Englishmen without distinction?' Krishnavarma answered: 'No, certainly not. You know my ardent admiration for my master Herbert Spencer.' But in the same

affection I join together the anti-socialist evolutionary philosophy and the most notable theory of Social Democracy We Indians known well that the English proletariat or working class is not responsible for our miseries and slavery On the contrary, we know well, as Mr Hyndman has shown, that the haughty British *capitalist class, which tyrannises over us, oppresses the proletariat* as much as us ' When Longuet asked You are not a Socialist, then? Krishnavarma said No, I am a Spencerian However, there are some Socialists amongst our friends But really, the whole question for us is first to rid ourselves of the foreign domination "]

This statement by Krishnavarma shows typical characteristics of the political-ideological attitude of a section of the Indian nationalists at that time The nationalist Krishnavarma who personally was an adherent of an anti-socialist, anti-Marxist philosophy collaborates closely with the socialist workingclass movement and maintains friendly relations with its leaders in the struggle *for the national liberation of his country* The *connecting link* is the common antagonism to British imperialism The fact that in India too capitalist relations of production were developing is entirely left out of consideration

Krishnavarma remained consistent in his attitude towards socialism and the workingclass movement all his life He emphasized the friendship and cooperation with the socialists But in place of the social question whose revolutionary solution is the object of the socialist revolution, he put the national question which was in the foreground in India In this connection he pointed explicitly at the expediency of adopting the experiences from the European workingclass movement

Krishnavarma's *Indian Sociologist* was directed exclusively towards the one object—achieving national independence The numerous speeches and articles by Hyndman and other socialists cited there have been selected and reproduced from that point of view An article ' The Indian Liberation Movement ' published in the same journal in 1909 therefore arouses our interest all the more because it contains theoretical reflexions more far reaching than those of other Indian ideologists of this time The advice that excerpts from books on the American French and Russian Revolutions should be published was not extraordinary in itself its full meaning was only revealed in connection with the follow-

ing considerations The author is setting before the national revolutionary intelligentsia very pointedly the task to work among the masses and make converts from among them to the Revolution He is not satisfied with this general appeal but turns to the different classes and strata of society He is challenging the intellectuals not simply to work among the peasantry but is asking them to agitate them in connection with agrarian question This was done in spite of the general attitude of Indian nationalists towards the agrarian question whose radical solution they were afraid of as an unusual and progressive step

Also the Indian working class is included in these considerations The author takes a step ahead compared with the progressive forces in India at that time who regarded the strike nearly exclusively as a means in the struggle against colonial domination but not as a legitimate weapon of the workers for defending their social interests against the indigenous and foreign exploiters Here the intellectuals are requested to work among workmen and mill hand organise strikes among them, at present for higher wages and shorter hours so that they may strike for liberty when necessary Clearly the author is differentiating here between the economic struggle of the working class for the improvement of its social condition and the political strike for winning national freedom The two objectives of strikes are regarded as justified but the economic struggle is characterized as the first stage for the second higher form the political strike

The numerous contacts of Indian nationalists with the British workingclass movement resulted in the fact that Indians became members of English workingclass organisations There is no information about their number but quite a few examples can be cited[1] In this connection Shapurji Saklatvala[*6] is to be mentioned He maintained contact with Indian revolutionary groups in London and Paris participating in their public meetings It seems that Saklatvala began relatively early to work less in the national revolutionary movement than in the British workingclass movement especially in the ILP of which he became a member in 1910 Already in January 1911 the British police reported that Saklatvala was trying to bring about the cooperation between members of the ILP and the Indian nationalist movement[*7] This new tendency within the framework of the political activities of the Indian national revolutionaries in Europe which was further

complemented by the new open collaboration between the Indian and Egyptian nationalists,[2] gave rise to alarm among the British authorities. According to a report by the British secret police on the Indian revolutionary movement in Europe in spring 1911 the four main lines of work were:

—the dissemination of seditious literature,

—the export of arms to India for purposes of assassination,

—working up the sympathy of the Labour and Socialist parties in England,

—cooperation with the Egyptian extremists in making common cause against the English".[3]

It is said in this report explicitly that "the socialist campaign is being conducted chiefly by S. Saklatvala in Manchester and B. C. Pal in London," and that "the former is in constant communication with Madame Cama, thus linking up all these different movements".[4]

A new trend was clear in the Indian national revolutionary movement abroad clearly. Direct collaboration with the socialist workingclass movement and also international solidarity with other peoples fighting against imperialist oppression and exploitation.

The Indian group in France was in close contact with socialist circles around the newspaper *L'Humanite*. Especially the leaders of the French Socialist Party Jean Jaures and Jean Longuet were interested in problems of the national liberation movement. J. Longuet who as an editor was responsible for the discussion of international questions in *L'Humanite* was in close touch with Indians, Egyptians, Japanese, Chinese and patriots from other countries of Asia and Africa.

Like in England in France also relations with the socialist movement existed already from the time when the Indian revolutionary centre began emerging. Madame B. R. Cama and S. R. Rana most probably had been in contact with the workingclass movement in England already before 1907. This assumption is based on the fact that although B. R. Cama settled down finally in Paris only in 1907, already in August of the same year together with S. R. Rana she took part in the International Congress of

Socialists in Stuttgart That Madame Cama was very close to the Socialist Party of France is confirmed by the British secret police in August 1910 It is reported in the Paris newspapers that La Citoyenne Cama is joining the Conference of the Socialist Federation of Seine as an Indian Socialist' Since it was also stated by the police that Madame Cama had been prominent in socialist circles in Paris for some years ' her early relations with the socialist movement are proved V Chattopadhyaya and M P T Acharya became members of the Socialist Party of France in September 1910[3]

Madame Cama passed through an interesting ideological development during those years Not only did her political opinions become more radical but beyond this we can observe in her at the same time the results of a qualitatively different political ideological influence A special role in this connection was played by her friendly relations with the Russian Social Democrat Michael Pavlovich who lived as a political emigre in Paris Pavlovich reminisced about Madame Cama We used to meet often and discussed problems of revolution in India she was deeply interested in the Russian revolutionary activities especially in the revolution of 1905 and the role played by the proletariat in the revolutionary uprising She had also studied to some extent the theories of Marxism [4]

In her speech at the International Congress of Socialists in Stuttgart in 1907 Madame Cama accused British capitalism of exploiting India recklessly and in condemning in this way one fifth of humanity to hunger and misery In this connection she also referred to socialism equating it with justice" and demanding in its name freedom for the Indian people[5] Five years later in February 1912 the journal *Bande Mataram* published by Madame Cama from Paris brought out a long article under the caption 'What Shall We Do Then?'[6] The writer holds mainly the British government of India responsible for famine and plague in India and proceeds The Hindustani revolutionists see the vision clearly that the situation can be changed by the overthrow of the British rule and by establishing a system of government which will mean a final death blow to any kind of robbery and exploitation by any class under whatever pretext.'[7] This vision of the type of Government of free India shows that it was based on conceptions of a society without exploitation of man by man Compared to

1907 when Madame Cama had accused only British capitalism as the exploiter and had also applied the notion of class struggle only to the relations between British imperialism and the Indian peo p l. the article of 1912 signifies a qualitative step ahead It shows that some members of the Indian national revolutionary move ment in West Europe had begun under the influence of the socia list workingclass movement to formulate v ews regarding the future social development of India which contained a non capi t alist tendency

As V Chattopadhyaya related later Madame Cama reported to the other members of the Indian group in Paris after the Con gress in Stuttgart about Lenin and the Russian Social Democrats and of their attitude towards questions of war and the right of self determination of nations But none of us understood at that time the enormous sign ficance of the split in the Social Democra tic Party and of the role of Lenin This proves that B R Cama did not only inform her friends about the discussion on the colonial question but also about the other important ideological problems of the international workingclass movement discussed in Stuttgart But it also shows that the great majority of the Indian national revolutionaries did not yet understand these basic questions

The contacts of the Indians in North America with American workingclass movement developed in a twofold way Firstly with the reformist trade unions which us ng racist arguments rigorously fought against the so-called competition by the workers coming from Asia Secondly with the revolutionary wing of the American workingclass movement which had formed the organis ation Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905

Contacts between Indians in the USA and the socialist workingclass movement had been established relatively early But there is a paucity of exact information about these beginnings Fortunately we have at our disposal an example in the person of Dr Narayan Krishna

Jean Longuet published an interview entitled An Indian So cialist in the *I Humanite* in Decemb r 1909 He introduced there a militant Indian socialist to the readers contrasting Dr Narayan Kr shna with Indian patriots like Dadabhai Naoroji and Shyamji Krishnavarma who were no socialists After travelling

through various countries Krishna had come to the USA where he became a member of the Socialist Party in 1906 About his own ideological development Krishna said that he had been long before a follower of the radical wing of the Indian national libera tion movement During his travels round the world and through his own studies he had come to the conclusion that without an economic programme India s national demands would remain unworkable From this position Krishna came to scientific socia lism I became a socialist about 1903 by reading the works of Marx and Engels whose eager student I am [7] He worked for two years as a propagandist in the United States and organized on b half of the Socialist Party many meetings on the Asiatic ques tion Krishna had come to Europe in order to carry on propa ganda work with the intention of making the Socialist Interna tional propagate the ideas of scientific socialism in Asia but espe cially in India and Japan more intensively than before

Dr Krishna had come through his own experiences and by studying the works of scientific socialism to Marxist ideology His stay in the USA his membership of the Socialist Party and his work as a propagandist enabled him to discuss problems of the national and social liberation movement in a competent man ner which was unusual on the Indian side at that time

The political consciousness of the members of the Ghadar Party greatly developed within a short time An important role in the process of diffusing progressive ideas was played by Har Dayal who had published from the USA the first Indian biography of Karl Marx in Calcutta in 1912 [8] He was specially capable of doing so because he had become acquainted as an active member of the Indian national revolutionary movement with scientific so cialism and was maintaining at the same time close relations with the revolutionary forces of the American workingclass movement with the Industrial Workers of the World in particular Although Har Dayal did not understand important aspects of Marxist theory and also partially succumbed to anarchist influences [9] he was nevertheless able to pass on some basic socialist thoughts to his countrymen in the Ghadar Party

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna the first President of the Ghadar Party has even in his old age again and again stressed the great importance of the fact for the ideological development of the members of the Ghadar Party that Har Dayal had talked to them

about Karl Marx and his teachings Sohan Singh described how they all became enthusiastic when Har Dayal was speaking to them about the founder of scientific socialism in the *Jugantar Ashram* the headquarters of the Party where the leading members lived in a commune[1] On another occasion the aged Ghadar leader said that Marx's writings showed the Indians in America 'a new light, a new vision and a new path'[2]

Har Dayal worked actively in the IWW was on friendly terms with the trade union leaders and had close contacts with Russian immigrants as well as with representatives of other revolutionary liberation movements He was also active among the students At meetings of Indian students in Berkeley also American socialists made speeches[3] In a reading-room for Indian students of the Berkeley University publications on scientific socialism and other progressive literature were available[4] These students who participated in the political work of the Ghadar Party also became agents of progressive thinking

It is no wonder, therefore that also among the members of the Ghadar Party the influence of socialist ideas became visible and contacts with the socialist workingclass movement existed as well in the USA as in Canada Added to this must be the influence of the Russian revolutionary movement which taught the Indians that the maltreatment meted out to them was a part of the capitalist exploitation of workers of the different nationalities and race and colour prejudice was only another form of class snobbery[5] B Majumdar says about the Ghadar Party that there was in its ideology from the very beginning a vague reference to socialist principles which broadened into communistic ideas later on'[6] L V Mitrokhin and A V Rakov have emphasized that the thinking of the members of the Ghadar Party was not yet based on scientific socialism and that their socialist conceptions were still very vague[7] But nevertheless this Party was different from all other organisations of the Indian national liberation movement in important aspects

The Ghadar Party had a broad mass base As stated by Ajoy Ghosh this aspect was of special historical importance because in India itself "the masses of people had not yet entered the political arena They seemed inert apathetic'[8] The decisive role of the masses in the revolutionary movement of the Indians in North America is high lighted by Har Dayal in a revealing article

published in Switzerland in 1914 The movement is entirely one of the people The members of the party are peasants and working men There are only about half a dozen educated men to edit the paper carry on correspondence deliver lectures and think out plans

As proved by the British police reports the Ghadarites had been not only carriers and harbingers of patriotic ideas but were preaching after their return to India the doctrines of revolution that they had learned from the Ghadar and the crude socialism that they had picked up in the towns of Western Canada and the United States [4] It is true that these were crude ideas But we have to put on record that the members of the Ghadar Party kept aloof from the rich and propertied classes The paper Har Dayal says reaches the masses men poor in wealth but rich in courage it does not appeal merely to the so called educated men and aristocrats whose heart is in their bank accounts while their lips prate of liberty and sacrifice When the common people understand something they want to risk life in order to realise the ideal They have no property to make them cowards The later events when the Ghadarites returned to India in order to start a rebellion against British rule have confirmed this estimation The upper strata in the Punjab demonstrated their loyalty and supported the colonial government But in regard to the poor sections of the population the police report had to admit Among the lower orders however they met with a certain amount of success [5]

Liberty and equality were the basic demands of the Ghadar Party Free India should have a system of government free from all foreign control and which should have as its aim the greatest good of the greatest number The members took an oath to fight for the realization of equality [6] Very definitely Har Dayal is characterising the ideological attitude of the Ghadar members in the article already referred to The ideal of the people comprises both political and social changes They desire economic as well as political freedom They hate the princes landlords and capitalists They want a democratic rearrangement of conditions in India

In conclusion it can be said that the Indian national revolutionary liberation movement abroad had in all its centres[5] contacts and relations with the international socialist workingclass move

ment The starting point of these relations which became increasingly intensified was the striving for support for the national freedom struggle From this different forms of cooperation in the common struggle against imperialism emerged that made visible the perspective of the worldwide alliance between the national liberation movement and the international workingclass movement

The international socialist movement influenced the Indian national revolutionaries ideologically The extent and the depth of this influence varied Some Indian revolutionaries became not only members of socialist parties or of other working class organisations but also acquired a certain knowledge of the theory of scientific socialism A considerable number came into contact with socialist ideas and organisations some even became members but they remained basically national revolutionaries in spite of the fact that they had accepted certain socialist ideas Many of them embraced Marxism Leninism after the experiences of the first world war and under the impact of the Socialist October Revolution Others remained attached to the workingclass movement without joining it

NOTES

1 Shyamji Krishnavarma was living in England since 1897 For his political activities see I Yajnik *Shyamji Krishnavarma Life and Times of an Indian Revolutionary* Bombay 1950

2 National Archives of India New Delhi (in the following NAI) Home Dept Pol Dec 1914 Nos 169 70 A DCI to Home Secretary Government of India 10th Nov 1914

3 In London public meetings organised by the revolutionary group were attended by 50 to 100 Indians mostly students The Indian Society in Paris had 20 to 30 members

4 The majority of the Indians who went to North America before the first world war belonged to the Sikh community

5 Military decorations Among the Indian emigrants to America were many who had been soldiers in the British Indian Army The Awakening of the Sikhs *The Free Hindustan* Sept Oct 1909 quoted after NAI Home Dept Pol March 1913 No 150

6 H Daval, 'India in America", *The Modern Review*, July 1911, pp 1 sqq

7 The idea of communal harmony was expressed for instance by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya in a poem "Awake, Arise" (*Talwar, Organ of Indian Independence*, Vol I, No 1, November 20, 1909) saying "Awake, Arise, 'and march, my comrades, Hindu, Muslim, Hand in Hand Let us stand and fight together' '

8 In the "Rules and Regulations of the Hindustani Association in North America every member is expected to "eliminate prejudice of caste, color and creed, from himself", NAI Home Dept, Pol, June 1911, No 103 B

9 The friendly relations between Dadabhai Naoroji with Henry Meyers Hyndman, co founder and leader of the Social Democratic Federation are well known

10 For the political work of H M Hyndman see C Tsuzuki, *H M Hyndman and British Socialism* London, 1961, A L Morton, G Tate, *The British Labour Movement 1770 1920*, London 1956

11 See V I Lenin, "Hyndman on Marx' *Works*, Vol 17, Moscow 1963, pp 306 sqq K Marx to H M Hyndman (*Draft*), 2 7 1881, K Marx F Engel, *Works*, Bd 35, Berlin, 1973, pp 202 sqq Karl Marx, *Biographie*, hrsg ven Institute fur Marxismus Leninismus b ZK der KPDSU, Berlin, 1973, pp 741 sqq

12 V I Lenin, "Hyndman on Marx", loc cit p 307 note

13 "Home Rule for India", *The Indian Sociologist*, Vol I, No 3, London, 1905

14 Mr Hyndman on "India's Complete Emancipation", in loc cit, Vol I, No 8

15 Like some progressive scholars in other countries where capitalism was developing towards the end of 19th century as, for instance, in Japan and China Russia and Poland, Krishnavarma could also see in Spencer's teachings an instrument of the struggle for scientific knowledge and against religious mysticism, for social development and against immobility and stagnation (vide *Geschichte der Philosophie* Ubersetzt aus dem Russischen B D III Berlin, 1961 p 407) In addition the following aspects are to be mentioned Spencer has advocated as an ideologist of British capitalism during its heydays the Principle of laissez faire Linked up with this was the view that the freedom of individual actions, the competition and the survival of the fittest were things necessary for society At the same time he criticized the British colonial policy in India These two aspects of Spencer's teachings formed the starting point for Krishnavarma's opinions

16 J Longuet La Revolte de l Hindoustan *L Humanite* 18 2 1909

17 S Swami The Indian Liberation Movement *The Indian Sociologist* Vol V No 9, 1905 There is no further information about the author

18 *Ibid*

19 When the English socialist and member of parliament (Independent Labour Party I L P) Keir Hardie paid a visit to India in autumn 1907 the young Indian engineer K Chowdry was accompanying him as his honorary secretary Chowdry had studied in Manchester and had become there a member of the I L P He returned to India in 1906 (India Office Records London Judicial and Public Dept, file 3476) K Chowdry founded the Socialist League in Calcutta in October 1907 (see *Vorwarts* Berlin 7 11 1907)

20 Shapurji Saklatvala came as a representative of the Tata House to London in 1905 About his life and political work P Saha *Shapurji Saklatvala A Short Biography* PPH New Delhi, 1970

21 Under the impact of the Socialist October Revolution and disgusted by the reformism of the Labour Party S Saklatvala became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1921 *ibid* pp 4 sqq

22 NAI Home Dept. Pol Jun 1911 Nos 17 19 B

23 H Kruger Indias Freedom Struggle and Beginnings of Solidarity Between National Liberation Movements before World War I in Various Countries *Studies in the Foreign Relations of India Prof H K Sherwani Felicitation Volume* ed by P M Joshi Hyderabad 1975 pp 314 sqq

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INDIAN REVOLUTIONARIES IN THAILAND TILL 1941

ARUN BOSE

India's fight for freedom was fought not only at home but also abroad where the local Indian residents and revolutionary emissaries from India played a very significant role Among such foreign theatres of Indian revolutionary activities Thailand was a very important one It was an immediate neighbour of India (which then included Burma) with a long ill guarded frontier where a sizeable Indian community was fast taking shape since the beginning of this century The early Indian immigrants were a few families of south Indian Muslims followed by hundreds of Punjabis mostly Sikh ex servicemen They were not a particularly politically conscious group but living among a free people away from the traditional inhibitions at home and being exposed to the stirring events in China and Japan they especially the assertive Punjabis soon began to feel the pinch of slavery and the urge somehow to be useful to their motherland

To such an Indian community of around a couple of thousands the message of revolution was first brought in 1912 or 1913 by two emissaries of the *Yugantar* group in Bengal Bholanath Chatterjee and Nani Lal Bose The former is known to have taken up a job in Bangkok waterworks while the latter joined a Buddhist institution ostensibly as a novitiate [1] They soon established contact with a local Indian lawyer Kumud Nath Mukherji and the local Punjabi traders prominent among whom were Buddha Singh Narula Thakur Singh and Lodha Singh The Sikh *gurdwara* at Pahurat in Bangkok was the main centre of their activities whence they soon established contact not only with the local German legation but also with German engineers like Luelers and Doerring and Punjabi workers like Sardar Amar Singh Ram Singh and Arya Singh were engaged in the construction of the Bangkok Penang railway line [2] Even a few local traders like Dewan Chand Gan Pat Rai and Chatur Lal were soon attracted into their orbit [3]

Soon they were in active communication with their compatriots on the west coast of Canada and the United States and began receiving copies of the *Ghadar*.[5] They also received in full measure the fall out of discontent from the tragic voyage of the *Komagata Maru*. By the middle of August 1914 one Col Muazi Bey, a pan-Islamic emissary from Turkey, also came to Bangkok via Saigon and soon established effective link between the local Indians and the pan Islamic movement abroad.[6]

That public opinion was, by and large, anti-British and to utilise it to put pressure on the Thai Government, Dr Hertaka, the German Press Attache at Bangkok, started a propaganda offensive by paying handsome bribes to a few local dailies.[7] From the beginning of October the Germans also began publishing their own propaganda daily, the *Unshan*.[8] Almost at the same time, Dr Voretzsch, formerly German Consul at Hong Kong, was sent to Bangkok with DM 100,000 to take charge of the preparations in Thailand in connection with the organisation of a revolt in India.[9] Special arrangements were made by three Indian business houses in Thailand for carrying on secret correspondence and financial transactions, and the following few months saw an unprecedented increase in the number of shot guns imported into Thailand.[10]

In the meantime, the Indian Independence Committee had been formed in Berlin and the German legations in the US and the Ghadar revolutionaries had been informed of the latest plans and preparations regarding the desired revolt in India. Early in November 1914 Satyendranath Sen and Vishnu Ganesh Pinglev from the US came to China, on their way to India, with necessary instructions. In China they met Dr Sun Yat sen and Tahal Singh, the leader of the Indian patriots in Shanghai.[11] In order to strengthen contacts between the Indian groups in China and Thailand, Ishal Singh soon thereafter sent Atmaram Kapur, Santosh Singh and Shiv Dayal Kapur to Bangkok with necessary instructions.[12] It was arranged that the Ghadar revolutionaries, instead of returning home direct from Canada or the US, should first come to Shanghai and then proceed to Bangkok via Amoy and Swatow so that they might regroup themselves somewhere in Thailand whence they could mount an armed assault on the frontier of Burma (then a part of India).[13] Arms were collected and kept in tunnels and pits near Paloh close to the Burmese border.[14] With the transfer of Dr Vor-

etzsch to Shanghai in January 1915 the German legation there became the controlling headquarters of all Indian revolutionary activities in East Asia with Bangkok as the advance base[14]

The Independence Committee in Berlin was, so far, interested mainly in sending arms to their comrades in Bengal But, when Maulvi Barakatullah reached Berlin on 9 January 1915[15] they were impressed with his argument that the proposed shipment of arms should be co ordinated with the planned assault from Thailand This view carried weight with the German Foreign Office also and Barakatullah had a meeting with Dr Daus Dekkar of Java in this connection in the third week of January[17]

It seems that details about the developments in Thailand had reached the Indian revolutionaries in the US by the beginning of March 1915 Herambalal Gupta, the representative of the Indian Independence Committee, Berlin, in the US met the German Ambassador Albert Bernstorff with the request that the proposed assault from Thailand should be better equipped both from the point of view of arms and leadership, and suggested that another shipload of, at least, 8,000 rifles, 2,000 revolvers and a few machine guns should be sent, especially for Indians in S E Asia[18] Gupta then met Kurt von Reiswitz, the German Consul at Chicago, who introduced him to four other Germans George Paul Boehm, Albert Wehde, Mueller and Sterneck, who were to purchase arms and to accompany the proposed ship to provide training and leadership to the Indians in Thailand[19] On 9 April Bernstorff recommended to the German Foreign Office that another ship with arms should be sent on time to synchronise with the planned shipment of arms direct to the Indian coast[20] Within the following three weeks Reiswitz paid 40,000 dollars to his men for the purchase of arms for S E Asia[21]

In the meantime, Atmaram Kapur had come to India in March and had told Jadugopal Mukherjee in Calcutta about the proposed expedition and preparations in East Asia and the code words and signals to be used[22] However, reports had already reached the US that Indian leaders in Thailand lacked dynamism and unity and that the progress of preparations there was far from satisfactory So, as desired by Herambalal Gupta and Ramchandra, the Ghadar leader, Yodh Singh Dansi Chenchhaya and Sukumar Chatterjee left San Fransisco on May 22 or 23 for Manila on

their way to China and Thailand.[~] They were carrying a message for the redoubtable Bhagwan Singh at Manila, but on their arrival there on June 19 they discovered that he had already left for Japan only two days earlier.[1] So they left Manila on 26th to reach Amoy on the Chinese coast on July 2. Thence they proceeded to Swatow and reached Bangkok in two batches on July 17 and 22.[~]

By then nearly five hundred armed men had been collected in Thailand and in May six revolutionaries, including Sohanlal Pathak and Ram Singh alias Narain Singh had wriggled into Burma for preparatory work in connection with the proposed attack.[~] However, in the meantime the ship *Henry S* carrying clandestine arms from Manila, had been captured by the middle of July[~] and the details of Indo German activities in East Asia were no longer a secret. The Thai government was alerted by the British and on August 1, 1915 most of the prominent Indian revolutionaries there, including the newcomers were put behind the bars.[23] Other arrests took place within the next few weeks and on October 15 the Thai Government, under British pressure, had to put restrictions even on the free movement of Indian activists in S. E. Asia.[29]

However, the Indians living at a distance from Bangkok had escaped immediate arrest and according to previous arrangement, forty of them well equipped with arms and thirty mules left Chieng Mai on August 3 for the Shan States in Burma. They were to meet a similar party of armed Germans and Indians from Yunan at an appointed spot on the Sino Burmese border. But they lost their bearings and failed to effect a meeting, the former group returned to Thailand and dispersed.[29] Sohanlal Pathak and Ram Singh were arrested at Maymo on August 15 and 19, respectively.[31] That was the virtual end of Indian revolutionary activities in Thailand during the first World War. another attempt was made to revive activities in Thailand through the Indonesian rebel Dr. Daus Dekkar. Accordingly, he left Rotterdam on 8 September 1915 and reached Hong Kong at the end of October. There he was arrested and he confessed everything.[32] For the remaining period of the war Thailand under British pressure remained quiet, while Java and more so China continued to provide relatively safe bases to Indo German acti-

vities for a couple of years more Among the Indians arrested Buddha Singh Narula, Sohanlal Pathak and Ram Singh were sentenced to death, while Amar Singh was given life transportation to the Andamans whence he emerged in 1934 to play once again an effective role in Thailand during the Second World War

The decade following the First World War saw the growing Indian community once again turn its attention to its earliest pursuit, that is for a good living It is only since the early thirties that the placid life of Indians there came to be stirred once again by revolutionary emissaries as well as by the developments around them following the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the Chinese boycott of Japanese goods

The message of nationalism was once again brought to the Indians in Thailand in 1932 when Prafulla Kumar Sen, better known by his monastic name Swami Satyanand Puri, reached Bangkok with a personal letter from Rabindranath Tagore for the King of Thailand He soon carved out a very respectable place for himself in Thailand by virtue of his evident scholarship and ascetic life He was appointed a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University and wrote or translated into Thai over a dozen books on various aspects of Indian history and philosophy However, his chief contribution to the Indian community there was a new sense of unity and political consciousness [32]

The other well-known figure among the Indians there was Giani Pritam Singh who arrived there sometime in 1933 or 1934 While Satyanand Puri was sceptical about Japan's attitude towards other Asian peoples, Pritam Singh was all admiration for the Japanese and contacted the local Japanese Embassy soon after his arrival [33] However, such differences in their points of view did not prevent them from co-operating for a larger common cause and by 1936 a five man secret committee was formed to help the cause of their motherland Apart from these well-known two, others in this committee were the reputed Amar Singh, Chanda Singh and Naram Singh Chawla (who is still happily among us, a prosperous cloth merchant at Sampeng, Bangkok) A few others, like Bawa Kushal Singh, Harnam Singh and Manohar Singh, also joined this group, later [34]

The main purpose of this group was to act as the mouthpiece of local Indians and to establish contacts not only with national-

ist leaders at home but more so with the governments of Japan Germany and Italy through their embassies at Bangkok They could see the clouds of war collecting on the horizon and sought to utilise the coming developments to their own as well as to their national advantage In 1939 Naram Singh was sent to India for a few months to acquaint some of the leaders of the Indian National Congress of the work they were doing in distant Thailand [2] They especially Satyanand Puri took the initiative in 1940 to establish the Thai Bharat Cultural Lodge at Bangkok primarily to promote Indo Thai understanding and to provide for their secret activities a respectable cover They were in contact with Rashbehari Bose and his comrades in Japan mainly through Devnath Das who constantly shuttled between the two countries [3] No wonder when Major Fujiwara first came to Bangkok in August 1941 Col Yotani there was immediately sent to the southern island of Phuket to meet Naram Singh [4] It was this very group that actually served as the nucleus for the future Indian Independence League and assured perfect understanding between the Indian community and the advancing Japanese forces after the outbreak of hostilities in December 1941 Thereafter the Indians in Thailand were irresistibly drawn into the vortex of the Second World War and the so called Azad Hind Movement to which both the poor porter and the prosperous trader contributed his mite responding primarily to the appeals of their charismatic Netaji whom they viewed as an ascetic in arms [5]

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34 Statements of Narain Singh Chawla and late Raghunath Sharma

35 Statement of Narain Singh Chawla

36 *Ibid*

37 Statements of Raghunath Sharma and late Devnath Das

38 Statements of Raghunath Sharma and Narain Singh Chawla

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NOTES

1 Brown's thesis is entitled 'The Hindu Conspiracy and the Neutrality of the United States, 1914-1917"

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Part IV

1942 Movement

STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AZAMGARH DISTRICT

RADHA RAMAN AGARWAL

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

The Congress High Command seriously started to exchange thoughts to commence a large scale movement The result was that in Bombay on August 8 1942 the resolution on Quit India was passed

Consequently right after the Quit India resolution had been passed the British Government arrested many of the Congress leaders and workers present in Bombay After having got the news of arrest of the leaders the public of Azamgarh district was shocked On August 9 1942 the Police attacked the Congress Office locked it after having seized all the materials and arrested Mr Santoshanand present in the office at that time and the office of all the other political parties were also locked by the Government After this a search for other active workers started On the 10th of August among the arrested ones were Sri Krishna Madhawa Lal from Nevada Sri Umashankar Misra from Kaptanganj and Sri Lallan Prasad from Azamgarh From 10th to 11th of August many workers from other police stations were arrested and sent to jail As a result of these arrests the whole district was filled with tension The rest of the workers began to chalk out a programme secretly A few went outside to save themselves from being arrested All sections of people participated in this movement

On August 12 from Sri Chandra Shekhar Asthana of Kashi Vidyapith some pamphlets came into the district in which were mentioned a few suggestions on the principal slogan of—Do or Die they showed how to break the whole of the ruling machinery down through sabotage The students got the information Consequently on August 12 at 9 00 p m a workers conference was

held in Shri Krishna Pathshala In the conference, after having thought, it was decided to start the sabotage and destructions throughout the whole district altogether at one time and with the help of public to capture the police stations and Tahsils and to cut off the means of communications by cutting wires of telegraph and by removing the railway lines For this all the workers present there started in different directions after deciding to collect the instruments and the necessaries according to their plan Those going towards the railway lines were given wrenches and scissors to damage the wires and railway lines, these troops of the workers reached every main place and the market of the Tahsils of the district according to their plans There they collected the local workers and gave them the message Do or Die' to make the government machinery useless and damaged

MADHUBANA POLICE STATION EPISODE

According to Government order the Police In charge of Madhubana Police Station with a troop of constables and watchmen attacked the Congress office of Dubari circle snatched the Tri colour flag and tore it, broke the lock of the office and destroyed all the materials No sooner the workers heard of the barbarous deed of the police than they rose The workers of Tahsil level gathered in the village Gobarhi on August 13, and decided to capture Ghosi Tahsil As soon as the Police In charge of Madhubana heard of it, he sent message to higher authorities In this course, the District Magistrate Mr R H Niblett reached Madhubana Police Station at 10 00 A M on the 15th of August. Having learnt about his arrival there the workers of the circle showed more readiness and were determined to arrest the D M and attack the Police Station On that very day from all the circles in the Tahsil such as Fatehpur Dubari and Bibipur the public and the workers led by Sri Mangaldeva Rishi and Sri Ram Sundar Pandey reached there In this way a crowd of 25 thousand persons gathered there

Seeing a large multitude shouting the slogan Inqalab Zindabad' the Police In charge shut the gate and locked it from inside The District Magistrate the Police In charge and others were locked in In fact all this was done after seeing the multitude Mangaldeva Rishi and Ram Briksh Chaubey went to talk with the Police In charge and it was demanded that the Tri colour flag

must be hoisted upon the police station The Police In charge told that it could not be done in the presence of the D M On this a talk with D M was demanded which was refused by the Police In-charge

When Sri Mangaldeva and Sri Ram Briksh Chaubey came out and told these things the present crowd started to advance to wards the gate shouting victorious slogans and the very while guns began firing from the Police station The first prey of the bullets was Sri Ram Nakshatra Pandey Seeing the blood people became furious They surrounded the police station and started stoning The guns started to fire from above and below the police station Little minding the bullets people reached nearer to the police sta tion The second martyr who fell to the fire from above was Sri Ramapati Tiwari The constables named Mohan Singh and Has him shot down several persons In the meanwhile a stone thrown by Sri Darshan the shepherd struck the constable named Has him who at once became unconscious and fell down Right after his falling down the firing ceased On this the public after breaking the gate became so busy in trying to enter the police station that several persons were shot down dead on the ground At the gate when the people looked at the blood wet ground near their feet, they feared a little and to save their lives started to go astray Several of them lifted up their companions dead or wounded and began to return The police fired 149 bullets in all The firing was done from 4 00 to 9 00 P M with intervals According to govern ment estimate about two to three hundred persons were killed and nearly five to six hundred persons were wounded In the big crowd at the gate a number of dead bodies could be taken away by the public but once the crowd was scattered the taking away of dead bodies was to be treated as crime After this occurrence the D M kept himself shut there for three days because the police station was informed that the means of communication were cut off and that all the big or small bridges on the roads or paths going to Madhubana were broken On 17th August the D M rode an elephant brought from village Bhairavapur and came out with several watchmen taking long sticks etc According to pre deter mination the public surrounded him not far from the village Dana bad so that the D M might be taken But at that very moment military vehicles were seen going from Azamgarh to Madhubana

and the public withdrew and the D M reached Azamgarh safely in a military vehicle The list of martyrs is given below

1 Kumar Majhi—S/o Sri Aklu R/o Mirdadpur Died on spot
2 Banwari Yadava—R/o Katghara Madhubana Died on spot
3 Bandhu Noniyan—R/o Machhila Azamgarh Died after 25 days in Azamgarh jail
4 Bhagwant Singh—R/o Kuchai Indara, Azamgarh Died on spot
5 Munni Kunwar—S/o Sri Vibhut Kunwar, R/o Tighara Azamgarh Died after 4 or 5 hours at home
6 Rampati Tiwari—S/o Sri Shital Tiwari R/o Tinehra Found dead at a distance of 2 furlongs from Madhubana
7 Raghunath Bhar—R/o Takia Azamgarh Died in Azamgarh Jail
8 Ram Nakshatra Pandey—S/o Sri Kawal Nath Pandey R/o Kanhrapur Azamgarh Died on spot
9 Lakshpati Kuri—R/o Newada Indara Azamgarh Died on spot
10 Shivadhan Harijan—R/o Paharipur Madhubana Died after 3 days at home
11 Sommar Gadet—S/o Sri Ramdas, R/o Mirdadpur, Indara Azamgarh Died on spot
12 Hanif Darji—R/o Guramma Indara Azamgarh Died on spot

Note Many other dead bodies were found without being recognised

THE OUTBURST AT MAUNATH BHANJAN

The Tahsil Mohammadabad stands second in patriotic activities in the district In Maunath Bhanjan of this Tahsil the atmosphere was disturbed soon after they got the news of the arrest of the leaders On 9th August Sri Ram Palat Rai President of the circle Maunath Bhanjan was arrested and the other workers were being searched for Sec 144 was imposed against which the students and public began a strike that continued till 13th August In this period processions were taken out and meet-

ings were held Having got its information D S P Sri Kamal Singh with Reserve Police reached Mau

On August 14, information came of a special train controlled and guarded by the students of Benares Hindu University arriving at Mau Railway Station and immediately Sri Radhe Raman Agrawal and Hari Prasad Gupta and several other workers got the market closed and taking the public and students started for the station to welcome the train But the way to the station was blocked by the police force To scatter the crowd the police lathicharged, which made the people angrier A larger crowd went into hospital ground and under the presidentship of Sri Radhe Raman a meeting was held in which a proposal was passed to burn Mau Notified Area and capture the police station

After that the multitude advanced to hoist the national flag on Mau police station, but seeing a large number of armed police present outside, they went towards the Notified Area An opportunity was given to the workmen or clerks there to escape and after that all the papers and articles were burnt After settling the programme for the next day all of them went to their houses It was here at Mau that D M got the news about Madhubana police station casualty and on August 14, before starting for Madhubana he ordered the S D M to impose curfew that stayed only for the night According to the programme after the curfew was over, the public began to gather near D A V College and at 11-00 A.M a procession marched through the market and proceeded towards the police station At a distance of one furlong from the police station near Rauza, the armed police tried to stop the procession The police asked to disperse the procession The procession did not disperse and the police charged with lathis The lathis were answered with a volley of stones Enraged with this, the authorities ordered to fire The D S P himself started to fire with his revolver and with a bullet of his revolver Sri Dukhi Ram died on the spot and many others were seriously wounded Sri Kalika Prasad died after nearly three weeks

After this firing incident all 80 persons were accused of obstructing the police in the discharge of duty The case became famous as Mau Stone Case

On 17th August, the army was sent to Mau with Mr D P Hardy Reaching Mau he spread terror and from the railway lines he at once caught some travellers by force, made them naked, tied them to the pole on the chowk of the town and beat each of them with canes seventeen times and after giving each of them seven years rigorous imprisonment sent to Azamgarh Jail, who were acquitted in appeal On the 23rd of August at 5 30 A M the army attacked the house of Sri Radhe Raman Agrawal because he was an absconder Not finding him the army pushed the ladies and children out of the house and looted everything and burnt the house After that they broke the lock of his shop and looted the shop They made a list of absconded persons and put it on the chowk in which they were asked to present themselves failing which they were threatened that their houses would be looted and burnt too like that of Sri Agrawal

On August 28 in the case in connection with the burning of the Notified Area office after a summary trial all were punished with 2 years rigorous imprisonment and Sri Radhe Raman Agrawal was fined Rs 500/- in addition to 2 years imprisonment

Fifteen persons were punished in 'Mau Stone Case' too in which 12 persons got 6 months rigorous imprisonment, Sri Radhe Raman Agrawal got 2 years imprisonment and Sri Kunj Bihari Lal as well as Sri Mohd Hanif were given 2 years rigorous imprisonment with fifteen cuts with the cane

The martyrs in Mau movement were as under

1 Dukhi Ram Katua—R/o Katua pura purab, Mau S/o Devan Ram Died on the spot

2 Kalika Prasad—S/o Sri Banarsi, Pyare puri, Mau Died at home 15 days after the incident

THE CASE OF KAJHA

Kajha was a small English Estate whose owner lived in Calcutta The managers used to suck the local public by spreading disunity among them So the public thereof was unhappy with the managers In April, 1942, in a school a political conference of Fatehpur Circle was held with symptoms of new wakefulness Kajha too was aware of Mau and Madhubana cases and they also understood that it was a good opportunity to throw off the yoke

of slavery Consequently, on August 16, a huge crowd shouting slogans attacked the mansion in the presence of the manager and the servants, looted the property of the estate and burnt the office The manager and servants of the estate and watchmen of Chiraiyakot used the army against Kajha people On the 23rd of August the army reached Kajha and spread terror by loot and fire In this case a few others than Kajha people were trapped Forty seven persons altogether were accused in court, from among whom a few were exempted and the rest were punished from one to ten years of imprisonment The sentences of a few were reduced by the High Court

THE LOOT OF SATHIYAON RAILWAY GODOWN

On August 19, 1942 the public attacked the godown of the Railway station and broke three bridges and put Khurhat Railway station on fire in which with Sri Ram Dilas Pandey and Sri Dhanpati Singh all thirteen persons were accused in court and were punished

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Translated from Hindi by Sri A N Swarup

THE 1942 MOVEMENT IN BIHAR

SUMANTA NIYOGI

Gandhiji ke batiya mon me rakhiho bhai,
Bharat basiya ho bhai
Banga ki kheti koriho bhai, rupiya hoti dher
Charkha par je sutwa katiho, mat kariho sab der
Kargha par je kapra buniho, jhapiho apna deh
Pardesi ke asha chhoriho, mat kariho aab neh
Gaon gaon pathshala khol ke, parh le apna bhasha
Tarah tarah ke hunar sikh le, tab jiye ke asha
Gaon-gaon panchayat karke, jhagra dehu mitaye

—Composed by an unknown lyricist during the 1921 Non-Co operation Movement, this Magahi lyric became the song of rural Bihar *during the 1942 Movement*

The 1942 Movement, better known as the Quit India Movement, which was a stirring episode in the annals of India's struggle for freedom, was extremely intense and widely spread in the province of Bihar In fact, northern and central Bihar together with eastern U P formed the storm centre of the movement in the country The present article, while covering the various aspects of the movement in Bihar also attempts to explore significant points like the mass involvement, technique of mass contact and methods of mass mobilization

The inspiration, impulse and direction of the movement in Bihar came from the provincial leaders of the Indian National Congress But there was a division, chiefly motivated by ideological differences, in the provincial Congress leadership as to the method and programme to be adopted Rajendra Prasad, Anugrah Narayan Sinha and Srikrishna Sinha were ardent followers of the Gandhian line of a mass uprising on non-violent lines,[1] but Jayaprakash Narayan, who was then the Secretary of the Socia

list wing of the Congress, advocated a 'mass revolutionary struggle' even on violent lines, if necessary.[3] Jayaprakash wanted to inject Marxist activism in conservative lawyer dominated freedom movement. This difference had come to surface in 1940.

It was an immensely critical period in modern Indian history. The Congress leaders were confused about the strategy to be adopted towards the Second World War, and with Jinnah and his Muslim League followers getting closer to the Viceroy, Jayaprakash waged his battle against the League and the conservatives in the Congress and put forward his plea for the mass revolutionary struggle as the only way to end British rule. Though he had completed his prison terms in October 1940 he was again arrested within a few days for his Leftist revolutionary ideas and plans for an underground campaign against the government and was lodged at the Deoli jail near Ajmer, later transferred to the Hazaribagh jail. Mahatma Gandhi, however, opposed Jayaprakash's line of violence. But events, national as well as international, moved fast in 1941-42—Germany attacked Russia, Japan occupied Singapore and Rangoon, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose escaped from India and the Cripps Mission failed to reach a settlement in India. Even Gandhi's patience was getting exhausted, particularly after the failure of the Cripps Mission, "a postdated cheque on a crashing bank" in his own words. The confusing situation caused erosion of faith in non-violence among the Congress members what Rajendra Prasad calls "something like a crack in the dam" which got bigger as time passed on.[4] This question of non violence or violence continued to confuse the Bihar Congressmen throughout the movement. While Gandhi adhered till the end of his policy of non-violence, he at some places hinted for action and even approved of sabotage so long as they did not result in the loss of human life. Jawaharlal Nehru also notes that Gandhi's speeches and writings at this time were marked by 'a new urgency and passion'[5] and 'the hint of action instead of symbolic protest'.[6]

There was discontent everywhere in the country and the signs of an impending struggle with the British were evident all around.[8] It was in such a situation that Gandhi put forward his technique of mass contact. The Congress leaders were required to undertake long tours covering towns and villages and educate

the people, particularly the multitude of peasants and workers, about the fierce struggle for freedom ahead and to instruct the local Congress workers as to how to conduct the struggle on non violent lines Accordingly, Rajendra Prasad undertook an extensive tour of Bihar from April to June 1942 He acquainted people with the forthcoming struggle, and Gandhi's views, and also told them of the agitation assuming the nature of something like 'a civil disobedience, a non-violent struggle, but more forceful and intense" than anything attempted before[6] The tour was followed by a meeting of the provincial Congress leaders on July 31, 1942 partly to draw a programme for the coming struggle and partly to prepare for the All India Congress Committee session to be held at Bombay on 8 August Then came this historic Bombay session Its 'Quit India' resolution of 8 August sparked off the 1942 movement It called for "a mass struggle" on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale to free the nation from British rule Gandhi described the movement as an 'unarmed revolt' and open rebellion' The government gave initial push to the movement by arresting top Congress leaders including Gandhi, Nehru and Azad on the 9th morning at Bombay

In Bihar the first two days (August 9 10) showed a peculiarly subdued attitude On August 8 when the late evening news announced of the AICC resolution the immediate reaction far from being stirring, was one of 'little response' at Patna and of 'disgusting passivity' at Chapra-Muzaffarpur, the two chief centres of the movement in the province[7] Many eye witnesses conveyed that a sizeable section of the population maintained an attitude of non involvement and docility The news of the arrest of prominent Indian leaders was announced in the radio on the 9th morning But it failed to create that effect which had been expected The secretary of the Muzaffarpur District Congress Committee, Janakdhari Prasad, even complained after a public meeting at Tilak Maidan that none was really aroused and he even wondered if there had been enough preparation or desire among the Congressmen for this great struggle[8] The only event at Patna on the 9th that created some sensation without arousing many was the arrest of the ailing Rajendra Prasad, and the hearty send-off with garlands and slogans at Sadaquat Ashram before his departure for the Bankipore Jail

The Bihar Government's initial strategy was to nip the movement in the bud by arresting all top provincial and district Congress leaders, secondly, by banning the political bodies associated with the movement, and thirdly, by a strict censorship of the press This would take the steam out of the movement The government effort to make the movement spineless in this manner was proceeding according to plan. By August 10 many leaders were arrested and sent to jails in various parts of the province Anugrah Narayan Sinha and Srikrishna Sinha were arrested on the 10th morning, along with many other leaders[9] By the 11th morning Satyanarayan Sinha, Mahamaya Prasad, Phulan Prasad Verma and some other leaders were arrested right at the Patna Railway Station on their return from the Bombay AICC session and were lodged in the Bankipore jail Several other leaders were also arrested They included Dip Narayan Sinha, Mahesh Prasad Sinha (Muzaffarpur), Jadugopal Mukherjee (Ranchi), the novelist Satinath Bhaduri[10] and Bhola Paswan Shastri (Purnia), Harinath Mishra and Ram Krishna Benipuri, the poet (Madhubani) All of them were spearheading the movement in their respective districts The other towns also witnessed the same trend of arrest and imprisonment

The Government of Bihar followed it up by introducing what can be termed the 'rule by ordinances' By an extraordinary issue of the Bihar Gazette on August 9, 1942, a number of notifications were enforced[11] One notification declared the following organisations as unlawful the All India Congress Working Committee, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and all its branches at the district, sub-divisional and thana levels, the Provincial Committee of the Congress Socialist Party and its branches The financial assets of these bodies were seized, along with those of All India Spinners' Association (Bihar branch) and Khaddar Bhandar

The third repressive measure enforced by the provincial government was press censorship It put into force the Government of India's order which prohibited the publication of any news, particularly the incidents concerning the 'mass movement', the speeches of leaders and individual statements against the government measures, except those emanating from official agencies The press censorship was so stringent that not much information of those fiery days are available either in the *Indian Nation* or the

Searchlight, the two leading British dailies of Bihar, both published from Patna Even the arrested leaders confirmed that their main source of news had been the new batches of *Satyagrahis* coming to the jails [11] However, the curb on press freedom, along with the arrest of leaders and the banning of political bodies, instead of stalling the movement gradually accelerated its tempo in Bihar

The Bihar Congress Committee retaliated by bringing out the First Circular the next day [12] It was the first clear indication of the Congress programme and strategy as well as the first enunciation of the methods of mass mobilization The circular declared that the Congress under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership was waging non violent, non cooperation and *satyagraha* against the British Government The British Indian Government entered the Second World War without considering the attitude and willingness of India Britain, the circular further noted, pleaded that she had entered the war for safeguarding democracy and independence in all countries How could she do that when she deprived India of these two precious things? As Britain did not intend to free India from bondage, so the non violent *satyagraha* became inevitable, the circular emphasised To give the movement the broadest possible base, it suggested many ways of involving the masses The programme made the following prescriptions Firstly, observance of *hartal* everywhere as protest against the arrest of Gandhi and other leaders in which teachers and students, *zamindars* and peasants, traders and labourers, lawyers and government servants, *gariwans* and rickshaw pullers all would participate Secondly, tour of towns and villages by the Congress workers to educate the people and to inspire them for all kinds of sacrifice Thirdly, organization of meetings and processions in every town and village and hoisting of national flag in all schools colleges, *thanas* and government offices, the programme of the meetings must include raising of slogans and singing of songs of independence The Congress workers were instructed to disobey ban on meetings Fourthly, students must leave their schools and colleges, government servants including policemen, jail warders railway postal employees must resign from government service and join the movement, labourers at the Jamshedpur factory and other factories must resign from their jobs all of them would be entitled to

full compensation after independence Fifthly, people should not pay *chowkidari* and other union taxes Sixthly, the movement workers were advised to face *lathi* charge and shooting fearlessly and the policemen were asked not to *lathi* charge or shoot upon their brethren fighting for a noble cause Lastly, the participants in the movement were emphatically told not to resort to violence or underground activities as that would mean a negation of the ideal of *satyagraha* The circular ended with a note of optimism for the role of students It stated that much is expected of students and it was hoped that they would fulfil it

The circular clearly indicates that the Gandhian line of non-violence and *satyagraha* was adhered to by the Congress till the 10th of August, while the followers of Jayaprakash fared badly because their underground method was frowned upon by the majority in the Congress The prescriptions also confirm that the Congress was careful that it might not turn into an elitist movement confined only to the urban educated middle class and the rural landed aristocracy with links in the city, but should be most broadly based to include the rural peasantry and urban proletariat

But the Congress circular was only a guideline to a programme By itself it did not create any sensation The movement gained real momentum after the incident of 10 August 1942 at Patna A huge procession consisting of political workers, students, traders and labourers marched from the Bihar National College to the Secretariat, the seat of the provincial government, to protest against the arrest of Gandhi and other leaders, and to hoist the national flag at the top of the Secretariat building The procession reached the Secretariat late in the afternoon When some students in the demonstration went to hoist the tricolour, the police under orders from the District Magistrate, A W Archer, fired about fifteen rounds of shots on the demonstrators It resulted in the death of seven students, one student belonged to the B N College and others were of local schools [11] and serious injury to about 25 to 30 persons This was the ignition that caused conflagration spreading fast to the entire province Inspite of censorship the news of the shocking incident reached even the remotest corner of Bihar within a few days As Anugrah Narayan reminiscences, the firing did not deter the students two of them climbed up the

Secretariat building and were able to hoist the tricolour eventually, but the main gate of the Secretariat was flooded with blood, the incident kindled a new spirit and new determination in the people of Bihar[15] Sri Krishna Sinha was so much shocked that he asked the D M when the latter visited the jail next day, "Mr Archer, how could you give orders to kill youths?' Archer replied, They were moving forward inspite of the shower of shots' While appreciating the mention of their determined spirit by Archer, Sinha asked him, "would you tell your Secretary of State for India at London what great determination and aspiration of the Indian people is behind the movement?"[16] The day has been termed the Martyrs' Day in memory of the great sacrifices of seven young fiery spirits[17] The entire city remained awake that night Many processions with slogan shouting youths passed through the city streets throughout the night The shouts of *Inqulab Zindabad* in the streets could be heard within the four walls of the Bankipore jail by the arrested leaders who had nothing to see of the outside world except the starry sky which also presented a saddened look[18] Phulan Verma whispered into Sri Krishna Sinha's ears The Revolution is on [19] This conveys the real mood of the tense night

From the 11th August Patna was virtually under a reign of terror—*Atank ka Samajya* in the words of Anugrah Narayan[20] Numerous persons were beaten arrested and imprisoned The police did not spare even prominent men The Bankipore Jail accommodated *satyagrahis* in excess of its capacity, and so many had to be shifted to the Camp Jail This caused another incident on 11th August Students burnt two government lorries which came to Bankipore Jail to take about one hundred inmates, mostly students, to the Camp Jail The lorries turned to ashes and some students fled too The incident added fuel to fire The violent events very much disturbed Rajendra Prasad, Anugrah Narayan Sinha and some other Congress leaders The former emphatically holds that violence was certainly not the motive of the Congress leaders but the widely publicised statement of L S Amery, the Secretary of State for India gave that impression, and the people at large took it for granted that the Congress endorsed violence[21]

But the killing of seven students was bound to give the move-

ment a violent turn The anti British feeling reached its peak at Patna and the people in general felt that violence could only be replied with violence At the Congress organised meeting at the Congress Maidan Kadam Kuan held in the evening of August 12 the strategy and programme of the movement was chalked out for the second time While it endorsed all programmes that had been set forth in the party circular three days ago it made a major deviation by setting aside the ideal of *satyagraha* and recommending instead a series of subversive activities Resolutions were passed urging people to severe means of communication by uprooting railway lines cutting telephone and telegraph wires, destroying roads and bridges and to take control of the police stations courts jails post offices and other government offices – The British authorities became extremely apprehensive of things taking a serious turn A W Archer the District Magistrate of Patna met Rajendra Prasad and Anugrah Narayan and insisted upon their writing an Appeal of Peace urging people to desist from violent activities and to work for promoting peace But inspite of being concerned at violence breaking out they boldly refused to make the appeal as that would amount to pleading on behalf of the provincial British authorities [3]

From Patna the movement spread fast to various parts of Bihar The areas of maximum intensity or the areas where the movement was most widely spread where tension continued for a long duration and where a large number of participants were attracted were Chapra Hajipur Muzaffarpur zone in north Bihar and Patna and the neighbouring area of Patna City in Central Bihar District wise Patna and Saran were most affected and tense If at Patna the killing of seven students created the momentum in the movement it was the brutal killing of the Congressman Jaglal Choudhury's son Indradeo before his eyes at Chapra that set the Saran district ablaze The areas of moderate intensity were the Monghyr Bhagalpur zone in the eastern Arrah Buxar in the western and Darbhanga Purnea in the northern parts of the province The southern part of Bihar except Ranchi was generally an area of low intensity The movement failed to create much of a stir in south Bihar This certainly does not imply that all was quiet on the southern front Sporadic incidents of violence arson and destruction of property were noticeable there too Some railway

routes proved to be extremely vulnerable The Patna Jhajha route in the eastern section and Patna Buxar route in the western section of the Main Chord the Patna Gaya line and the Sonepur Chapra route in north Bihar were heavily damaged when the movement turned violent As a result these areas went through severest repression even long after the movement subsided Constant police patrolling with order to shoot at sight was conducted to protect the lines Explosives were attached to the rail engines and they burst out with deafening noise to scare away the agitationists engaged in sabotaging activities Many innocent people were shot to death while crossing the lines by the patrolling parties [4]

The intensity of the movement might have varied in different parts but its pattern was more or less uniform in all the districts of the province The movement began with hoisting of the national flag by students in the local schools and colleges This was followed by a procession organised by the local Congress workers and joined by the students and other sections of the population which went to the office of the district magistrate or the sub divisional officer or the local board or to the local police station There are processionists raised slogans of freedom demanded release of the arrested leaders attempted to hoist the tricolour in the office buildings and the police station They also demanded closure of offices and insisted upon the Indian officials and employees to leave their jobs If the employees refused to do so then offices and police stations were attacked and in numerous cases set on fire In many police stations the constables and the officer in charge left their jobs and joined the processions In many others they ran away on seeing the huge processions approaching them To obstruct the arrival of police and military troops communication and transport links were disconnected Telegraph and telephone lines were cut off Roads were obstructed by placing branches of trees bricks and heavy stones and in most cases roads were cut off by digging several gaps each about three to four feet wide and two to three feet deep so that jeeps and trucks could not pass Many bridges were destroyed Rail lines were uprooted mostly in the Patna Kiul Patna Buxar Patna Gaya and Sonepur Chapra routes Many railway stations were also attacked and damaged too After this a people s gov

ernment or *jan sarkar* or *panchayat* was set up at numerous villages with its own head chief minister ministry administration and police system Police stations at several places were turned into districts with their own collectors D S Os and police officers In these and several other places the people refused to pay *chowkidari* and other taxes and rents In the villages particularly of Muzaffarpur Saran Monghyr and Saharsa districts refusal to pay these taxes became a common feature Demonstrations were organised with shouts of *Malguzari mat do chowkidari mat do iske chalte jo bhi ho*—don t pay land tax don t pay chowkidari tax come what may These *jan sarkars* or independent units some of which even carried on for several months were chiefly in operation in North Bihar The commissioner of Tirhut decided to close the police stations at Sahebganj Paru Lalganj Sonbarsa Majorganj and other places for their virtual non functioning

The participants in the movement represented a large cross section of the society The responsibility of leading and organising the activities was assumed by the ordinary landowning classes in the rural areas and the educated middle class or the professional bourgeoisie in the urban areas The term ordinary has been used to indicate that landowning classes do not necessarily include the landed aristocracy or big *zamindars* Except those who were Congress activists the majority of the members of the landed aristocracy were pro establishment if not pro British and some even went out of their way to help the government The big *zamindars* felt disturbed since the changes made through the Restoration of Bakasht Land Act and the Bihar Tenancy Act by the Congress ministry during 1937 39 – in the agrarian and revenue systems for ameliorating the condition of the peasantry at the cost of the aristocratic privileges Sir C P N Singh was the leader of the pro establishment landed aristocracy His speeches from the opposition bench against the proposed changes and Sri Krishna Sinha s forceful defence though they added a memorable chapter in the province s legislative history marked the division of the aristocracy into pro and anti Congress factions But we must not lose sight of the fact that some big *zamindars* though small in number helped the movement or participated in it even at the risk of their lives By ordinary landowning class we mean small *zamindars* and average landholders who owned land up to one

hundred *bighas* or a little more depending upon the region These landowners, who for several reasons can be regarded as the rural middle class were the most vocal as well as active participants in the movement in rural Bihar

The role of the urban middle class was vital in the movement in Bihar Equipped with modern education kindled with the spirit of freedom and nationalism, and influenced by the Western ideas of democracy and socialism, its members were in the forefront of the movement, being ardent supporters of the Congress programme A large number of teachers, lawyers, literateurs and journalists played significant role in moulding public opinion, mobilising the masses putting into action the programme of mass struggle and planning underground activities Bihar had a tradition of political movement and agitation since the Champaran Movement of April 1917—the first successful application in India of Gandhi's technique of *Satyagraha* The middle class, mainly of urban areas and, to a large extent of rural Bihar (the ordinary land owning class) had been the carrier of this tradition of movement as evident in the Non Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements Interestingly the students whose role in the 1942 Movement in Bihar, even taking into account the excesses committed in several cases makes a wonderful saga of heroism, courage and sacrifice belonged to the urban middle and ordinary rural land-owning classes

As for the other sections of the population the commercial bourgeoisie or the mercantile community the working class and the peasantry in several ways got involved in the movement The closure of shops in support of the movement was a common feature throughout Bihar In the town areas shops remained closed for many days We have numerous examples of Baniya traders and Marwari businessmen not only providing financial help to the movement but also actively participating in it In Sahebganj Katra and Paru Police stations of Muzaffarpur district, the local Baniyas and Marwaris helped the Congress workers in running their own governments[7] The rural peasantry of Bihar was also caught in the onrushing wave of freedom struggle sweeping through the country It was the image of Mahatma Gandhi and of his devotion and sacrifice for the cause of the country's freedom the arrest of the provincial Congress leaders and the killing

of seven students which motivated them to be associated with the movement The arrest of the Kisan Sabha leaders and the destruction of its offices confirm the government's concern at peasant involvement[40] The same can be said of the labourers in urban areas. Both peasants and labourers were active in road cutting, bridge destruction and rail-line uprooting activities Hundreds of them died of police and army firing[41] *It was the workers' involvement* that brought tempo to the movement at Gaya The workers of the Gaya Cotton Mills took out a procession on August 13 with shouts of 'Angrejo Bharat Chhoro', when it reached near the D M's office, the police opened fire, resulting in the death of labour union leader Jagannath Mishra The corpse was taken round the town and the people's anger was roused to its peak In the Jamshedpur's Tata Steel Factory and the Dalmianagar's Rohtas Industries the labourers ceased work for many days At Rohtas Industries the labour superintendent himself advised the workers to close the mills At the Belsand Sugar Factory of Sitamarhi in Muzaffarpur district the situation was so frightening that the European staff of the factory, along with their families were removed to Muzaffarpur for safety[42] At Dhanbad and Jharia *miners ceased work for* several days The peasants and workers joined the movement partly out of a new awakening and partly out of expectation of a better future

Two other remarkable points concerning participation are, first, the fairly considerable number of participants from the Muslim community and, secondly, the large number of women taking part in the movement Though Jinnah and his Muslim League followers were not supporting the movement and were getting closer to the Viceroy the attitude of the Muslims in Bihar did not reflect the League's trends The government records mention the list of arrested students, which include a reasonably good number of Muslim students[43] In the agitation many Muslim individuals sacrificed their lives for the country's freedom The female participation took place in several ways They joined processions took part in the *Satyagraha*, and some of them addressed meetings and courted arrest

When the movement turned violent the government resorted to more severe repressive measures In carrying out the policy of repression the civil and police officials vied with each other to

excel themselves If Archer started it at Patna by ending the lives of seven students, others did not lag behind Among them A J Salisbury the Additional District Magistrate of Darbhanga and James Tenbroke the District Magistrate of Muzaffarpur stood out prominently for being revengefully oppressive Ten broke had become a symbol of terror after his burning of Dip Narayan Sinha's Bithauli Ashram ' However, inspite of having such ready to strike type of officers the government found it impossible to bring the situation under control by police force only Moreover the police was not proving to be an absolutely reliable ally of the British authorities Many constables (about 550 by August 10 belonging to the Police Union led by Ramanan da Tiwari left their jobs to join the movement thus giving fur ther impetus to it So the government had to call in the army On 14 August military troops were brought chiefly from the Danapur Cantonment but it did not prove sufficient as the move ment spread far and wide and troops needed to be sent to several towns b sides Patna such as Chapra Muzaffarpur Darbhanga Arrah, Buxar Bhagalpur Monghyr and Begusarai to control the situation Therefore military forces—British American and Indian —were brought in from several places As rail communi cation was disrupted army reinforcements were brought mainly through river routes—a large contingent was rushed through the Ganges by steamer from Calcutta the Eighth Army was brought from Ranchi and the Jat Regiment from Benaras again by the Ganges The situation was brought under control within a week after the arrival of the army contingents But tension continued for a fairly long time, in some places such as the districts of Patna, Saran, Muzaffarpur, Arrah and Monghyr till mid Septem ber

The capital and the neighbouring area of Patna City where the law and order situation almost reached a breaking point dur ing August 11 13 was virtually under the army since August 14 The city was divided into three barricaded zones One barricade was put in front of the Science College and the other at B N College—Elphinstone Cinema Hall junction Every individual needed an identity card to enter from one zone to another The colleges of the Patna University were turned into army camps The bringing of American troops incurred strong displeasure of

the Congress leaders The British soldiers, called 'Tommies' and 'Gora Paltan', became object of terror to the civilian population at several places due to unrestrained excesses committed by them They often defied the civil authorities Many elders confirmed that the Tommies proved menacing in the day for ruthless beating and during night the panic-stricken areas experienced frequent door-knockings by some of these Gora Paltans' in search of 'Lalbibi' that is, beautiful women Not only the white soldiers, even the Indian soldiers were equally terrifying and in some cases, even unruly The Jat soldiers did not lag behind their Western counterparts in looting of shops and burning of houses and Ashrams at Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur Hence in several towns, besides Patna, the individual's life and property and the honour of the women were in danger

With the arrival of the army the police also became fearless, and most of them fully availed themselves of the opportunity to commit excesses Some of them even went to the extent of setting scores with their old enemies through false charges of implication in the movement or simply by killing them, again on the false ground of involvement in sabotage For this reason, *many innocent individuals too had to go underground to avoid* reprisals by police Fearing police reprisals many youths remained absconding[37] The military and police excesses helped to further augment the anti-British feeling among the common people, and in that sense had the indirect effect of rendering greater mass appeal to the movement

Violence was perpetrated on and resorted to by both sides Aided by the police and army, many individual Englishmen appeared as self-styled despots and indulged in repressive and violent activities A typical example of this was John Marick, a factory-owner of Adapur, Champaran, who took law into his own hands, killed and injured several persons and set fire to many houses[37] The Indians, on the other side, also left some horrible examples of violence Many eye-witnesses still carry the memory of merciless 'white-bashing' As a result, numerous innocent British, American and Europeans became victims of inhuman beating by Indian mobs at streets and public places in various parts of Bihar Many of them succumbed to injuries caused by heavy beating However it must be mentioned *that there*

were several cases in which Congress volunteers came to the rescue of foreigners even at the risk of incurring public indignation and guarded their houses and bungalows through day and night vigilance in those troubled days The best example was the success of the Congress volunteers in bringing under control by August 20 the workers subversive activities at the Belsand Sugar Factory of Sitamarhi and thereby saving the lives of many Europeans [47]

However one tribal group of Chotanagpur, called the Tana Bhagats, proved an exception to the rule and they set an example by keeping the movement non violent The Tana Bhagat Movement, which started as a struggle against the oppressive *zamindars,* money-lenders and the new land laws in the early 20th century, gradually assumed wider political character when the Tana Bhagats joined the Non co operation Movement in 1921 [48] Inspired by Gandhi s principles of non violence and civil disobedience they identified themselves with the Congress cause and participated in the Quit India Movement through a no rent campaign They stopped paying rent to the government A large number of them courted arrest as *Satyagrahis* Despite frequent provocations their adherence to the Gandhian principle of non-violence was unshakable

Excessive violence was not the only shortcoming of the movement Equally shocking was the exploitation of the movement by anti social elements and by selfish individuals for personal gains or settling old scores in purely personal affairs This had a definite role in weakening the movement Shop-lootings and even dacoities were committed in the name of agitation Strangely enough some people were lured into the agitation with the temptation of booty-making through dacoity and loot A veteran freedom fighter mentioned of a group of 'agitationists' brought to Patna from Purnea to participate in the demonstration with the hope of amassing good fortune through dacoity The official corruption was another aspect of the exploitation of the movement for personal gain Government employees in several cases incited the people to commit excesses [49] As for post offices those who manned them welcomed the arson and looting because irrespective of the fact whether cash was removed or not they could always plead that the cash had been looted Many officers in

charge of making investigation and reporting of property destruction for the purpose of compensation, took considerable amount of bribes from the affected individuals Thus, corruption at official level, though on a small but noticeable scale, gained ground during the troubled days, and the Indian office staff did more of the mischief than their British counterparts. As for the implication in false charges to crush the old enemies, one interesting example will make the point clear A group of villages was flooded in a part of the Patna district and remained marooned in August and September, 1942 One landlord used his manipulating ingenuity to exploit the situation in order to settle his dispute with villagers Taking advantage of the 'rule of ordinances' he told the police that the villagers had set up their own government with 'raja, ministers and commander-in chief' The accused villagers were arrested and brought to the Bankipore jail Fortunately Rajendra Prasad one day happened to meet them at the jail He was deeply touched by their untold suffering, forcibly thrust upon them by the manipulation of the landlord He took up the case on their behalf Soon the fabrication of the landlord was exposed and the Sessions Judge held that the case was groundless because having cut off from the world, the villagers knew nothing of the AICC resolution and had nothing to do with the Congress-led movement All the accused persons were acquitted but they had to spend two years in jail and a considerable amount of money on the case[3] Yet they were fortunate enough to be acquitted owing to Rajendra Prasad's intervention, most others trapped into such false cases suffered extremely

By the first week of September, 1942 the situation was well under control, though the tension continued The government did not make any relaxation of the measures, rather it continued to bring military reinforcements from outside There were still "considerable underground activities"[4] At Chapra Bar Library arrests were made as late as September 14-15 The agitation could retain its tempo for the first two months, after which it slowed down and then the people were mainly on the defensive against the repressive policy of the government Of course, some people made attempts in October and even November for reviving the movement Jayaprakash Narayan made an exceptionally

bold attempt to revive the movement He along with his six associates escaped from the Hazaribagh Jail on the Diwali night (November 9) when all *Satyagrahis* including Sri Krishna Sinha and Anugrah Narayan Sinha were absorbed in the night long celebration of the festival of lights[4] However it turned out to be the last flicker of the flame The movement had passed its peak intensity much before Jayaprakash's escape from the jail But the escape became an instant legend to which the Government contributed by offering ten thousand rupees for information leading to his capture Therefore even getting out of the jail he remained underground Even from his hideout he brought out several pamphlets newsletters and letters In one letter addressed to the American soldiers in India he appealed to them as soldiers of freedom to support us in our struggle for freedom by refusing to take part in Britain's imperialist and fascist war against India[5] But that was all His great efforts could not give a new lease of life to the movement

To sum up the eventual failure of the 1942 Movement in Bihar must not detract one from the fact that it was the first mass movement in the true sense of the term in Bihar's modern history All sections of the population were involved in it on an unprecedented scale Techniques of mass contact and agitation and methods of mass mobilisation had never been applied before so widely It was defeated but not disgraced Rather the struggle and sacrifice of the participants in the movement in Bihar added a glorious chapter in the story of our nation's struggle for freedom One more noteworthy point is its eventual failure brought new experience and people were convinced of a more organised and more gruelling struggle ahead which would need greater sacrifice courage and dedication In that sense it strengthened people's determination to fight on But on the other hand a gloom of depression and frustration cast over the major section of the population The government's severely repressive policy and the frightening role of the army bred the general impression that British rule was too strongly entrenched to be dislodged soon It might continue for many decades if not for good People in general were sad to note that the backbone of the movement could be broken by the arrest of its leaders Some condemned Gandhi's policy little realising that things became

easy for the government when the movement turned violent as it gave the government an opportunity to adopt a policy of repression and retaliation to end the movement.*

NOTES

1 Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* Bombay 1957 p 513 Anugrah Narayan Sinha *Mere Samsmaran* (My Reminiscences in Hindi) Patna 1957 p 392

2 Ajit Bhattacharjee *Jayprakash Narayan A Political Biography* Delhi 1975 pp 72 76 Anugrah Narayan Sinha *op cit* pp 392 93

3 Rajendra Prasad *op cit* pp 512 13

4 *Ibid* p 536

5 *Ibid* p 530

6 *Ibid* pp 530 33

7 Janakdhari Prasad *Kuchh Apni Kuchh Desh Ki* (Reminiscences in Hindi) edited by H P Sinha Muzaffarpur 1970 pp 155 56

8 *Ibid* p 155

9 Anugrah Narayan Sinha *op cit* p 388 Kameshwar Sharma Kamal Sribabu ka Jail Jeevan" in Ramdhari Singh Dinkar (ed) *Shri Krishna Sinha ka Abhinandan Granth* (S K Sinha felicitation volume in Hindi) Monghyr Sambat 2005 p 377

10 Subal Ganguly (ed) *Satinath Smarane* (in memory of Satinath Bhaduri in Bengali) Patna 1972 p 9

11 Government of Bihar Gazette 9 August 1942 Bihar State Archives, Patna

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* The research paper is prepared mainly on the basis of information obtained through interviews held with about 110 individuals who either participated in the movement or are eye witnesses to the eventful days In selecting individuals for interview care has been taken to include people of all classes castes religions communities and professions Men from urban proletariat and rural peasantry have been interviewed in fairly large number Eminent personalities in the fields of politics education literature and journalism have been interviewed too Besides these interviews the conventional sources have been explored too I must acknowledge my deep sense of gratitude to Dr H P Sinha of the Department of Political Science and Dr Rajendra Ram of the Department of History both of Patna University for their kind help in its preparation

12 Rajendra Prasad *op cit* p 540 Anugrah Narayan Sinha, *op cit* p 389

13 A copy of this is preserved at the library of the Sadaqaat Ashram the headquarters of the provisional branch of the Congress

14 K K Dutta (ed) *The Comprehensive History of Bihar* Vol III Part I Patna, 1976, p 187 Interestingly, all ill fated school students were attending class XI while the only college student was attending first year class

15 Anugrah Narayan Sinha *op cit* p 389 Kameshwar Sharma Kamal *op cit* pp 376 77

16 Kameshwar Sharma Kamal, *op cit* pp 376 77

17 The famous bronze sculptural piece, Martyrs Memorial, has been erected on the spot where the students were killed

18 Rajendra Prasad, *op cit* p 541 Sri Krishna Sinha also made a moving description of the frightening night See Kameshwar Sharma Kamal', *op cit* p 377

19 Cited in Kameshwar Sharma 'Kamal', *op cit* p 377

20 Anugrah Narayan Sinha, *op cit* p 390

21 Rajendra Prasad, *op cit* p 549 Anugrah Narayan Sinha, *op cit* pp 380-90

22 K K Datta, *op cit* p 287

23 Anugrah Narayan Sinha, *op cit*, p 389

24 Baldev Narayan, *August Kranti* (in Hindi) Patna undated, p 80

25 K K Datta *The History of Freedom Movement in Bihar* Vol III (1942 47), Patna 1957, pp 110 13

26 Government Records Quit India Movement, Report of the Commissioner of Tirhut to the Chief Secretary Government of Bihar, 25 9 1942

27 Government Records, Quit India Movement Letter of the Commissioner of Tirhut to the Chief Secretary Government of Bihar, dated 17 August, 1942

28 The Bihar Restoration of Bakasht Lands and Reduction of Arrears of Rent Act 1938, *The Bihar Code*, Vol IV, Patna, 1955, pp 100 15 Also see Rakesh Gupta, *Bihar Peasantry and the Kisan Sabha* PPH New Delhi, 1982, pp 189 221, for a study of the Bakasht struggle, and the *Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates* Vol III pt I, 1938, p 1223

29 K K Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar* Vol III (1942-47), Patna, 1957, p 110

30 Rakesh Gupta *op cit* p XXII By this time the Bihar Kisan Sabha was divided into several groups with sympathies for the Socialists, the Congress, the Forward Bloc and the Communists

The Communist sympathisers opposed the August Resolution and this proved fatal to the Sabha

31 Baldev Narayan, *op cit*, p 110

32 K K Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar* Vol III, p 90

33 Special Department, 1942 Movement File, Register of Arrested students

34 Baldev Narayan *op cit*, p 113 K K Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, p 115

35 K K Datta, op cit, p 116

36 Rajendra Prasad, *op cit*, p 553

37 K K Datta *op cit*, p 117

38 *Ibid*

39 R O Dhan, 'Tribal Movements in Chotanagpur' in S C Malik (ed), *Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization*, Simla, 1977, pp 204 5

40 Rajendra Prasad, *op cit*, p 551

41 *Ibid*, pp 545-46

42 K K Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, p 105

43 Anugrah Narayan Sinha, *op cit*, p 392, Kameshwar Sharma 'Kamal', *op cit*, p 377

44 Jayaprakash Narayan, File of Pamphlets Mahila Charka Samiti,

AUGUST REVOLUTION IN MEDINIPUR (1942 44)

GOPINANDAN GOSWAMI

Freedom struggle in the Medinipur district had reached the climax in the August Revolution But the beginning of the struggle may be traced back to the early years of the rule of the East India Company when the people had launched struggle against the British for protecting their rights

Bengal had lost her independence in the battle of Palasi in 1757 As a result of their victory in Palasi the British merchants emerged as the rulers of Bengal In 1760 the East India Company received from Mir Kasim the Nabab of Bengal zamindari rights on the districts of Chattagram Bardhaman and Medinipur Revolt against the British had begun in Medinipur at that time It culminated in the most remarkable developments in August 1942

At the initial stage there occurred a series of isolated and stray revolts These are (1) the Chuar revolt (1760 99) (2) the Sannyasi revolt (1773 1823 in Medinipur) (3) the Malangi revolt (1793 1804) (4) the Nayak and Paik revolt (1806 1816) (5) the First War of Independence dubbed as Sipahi Mutiny (1857) and (6) the Indigo revolt The peasantry the middle classes and the ordinary people of Medinipur had successfully passed through these tests The people of Medinipur had imbibed a spirit of struggle through the hereditary experience acquired in stages and over a long period of time

At the beginning of the series of the struggles Rani Siromani of Karnagarh in Medinipur had led the Nayak revolt She is reputed to be the first woman rebel of India There was also a rebel woman in the last struggle of Medinipur namely the August uprising She is the 73 years old Matangini Hazra The first woman rebel was dispossessed of her estates and was imprisoned (1769) Matangini had become a martyr in the last struggle She was killed by a bullet (29th September 1942)

The new phase of struggle began in the early years of the twentieth century The spirit of nationalism grew and the masses were awakened through the Swadeshi movement against the partition of Bengal Men and women of all ages participated in the movement through meetings processions abstention from cooking and celebration of *rakhi bandhan* Ordinary villagers also felt enthusiasm for the movement and were excited over it A secret organisation was established in Medinipur in 1902 Khudiram's martyrdom which inspired great enthusiasm and nationalist spirit followed from the trends generated by the secret organisation Hemchandra Kanungo and Satyendranath and Jnanendranath Basu (both of whom were the nephews of Rajnarayan Basu) were the builders of the organisation This secret organisation was not given a distinct name of its own Later the Anusilan Samiti and the Bengal Volunteers had built up organisations in Medinipur

Large numbers of students and lawyers had participated in the non cooperation movement during 1920 21 The students had left their schools and colleges and the lawyers had abandoned their profession Desapran Birendranath Sasmal was the first Barrister at law to give up legal practice During 1920-21 a movement for the abolition of the Union Board was launched in Medinipur under the leadership of Birendranath Sasmal the uncrowned king of Medinipur even without the support of the Congress As a result of the movement the government was compelled to withdraw the 227 Union Boards which were established in the Medinipur district The people had made great sacrifices and had borne all repressions Non violent resistance had led to success The great organisational capacity of Desapran Sasmal became a perennial source of inspiration for the ordinary people Although it is claimed that the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928 is the first successful Satyagraha in India the facts show that the resistance against the Union Board in Medinipur is the first Satyagraha to end in success The movement for resisting the Union Board was launched without the support of the Congress But in Bardoli the Congress and Sardar Patel had compromised with the state power

Both Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru had greeted the people of Medinipur for the tremendous resistance that they had built up against the British government during the Salt Satyagraha in

1930 The Salt Satyagraha was followed by the No Tax Campaign in 1930 33 During this movement even the ordinary people of Medinipur preferred repression to paying such a small amount of tax as 4 annas They were forced to abandon their homes which were auctioned away by the government and seek refuge elsewhere They suffered from hunger and disease and even died Yet the people of Medinipur refused to surrender to the government The movement showed the strength of the organisation built up in the district The ordinary people constituted the source of the strength of the movement

Three District Magistrates of Medinipur namely Mr Peddie Mr Douglas and Mr Burge were assassinated by the revolutionaries between 1931 and 1933 The activities of the revolutionaries had generated confidence in the minds of the people Even the most ordinary men however timid they might have been felt proud of such a manifestation of heroism

The people of Medinipur had become strong and fearless because of the impact of the non violent mass movement on the one hand and the violent activities of the revolutionaries on the other

The Quit India Movement of 1942 or the August Revolution followed these developments The movement constituted the final phase of the struggle for freedom and represented the climax of the organisational capacities and the revolutionary efforts of the people of Medinipur The August Movement has become a legend in Medinipur

The estuarial district of Medinipur was subjected to a severe Denial Policy during the Second World War Apprehending Japanese attack on India the British government had taken away all the boats bicycles and bullock carts of the people of Medinipur and the stocks of food grain that they had As a result the people began the movement for resisting the oppressive policy of the government Organisations were built up for this purpose In the Tamluk sub division a corp consisting of 50 000 volunteers was raised Hatred against the British rulers and the urge for revenge were aroused in the minds of the people through propaganda and Individual Satyagraha The independent minded struggling people of Medinipur had abandoned the methods of non violent struggle and switched over to the path of violent revolution The weapons they possessed were insignificant but their courage was tremendous

The Quit India resolution was adopted in the All India Congress Committee meeting held in Bombay on August 8, 1942 Gandhiji and all the front-ranking leaders of the Congress were arrested in the early hours of the next day According to the Quit India resolution Gandhiji was to lead the movement But the movement was not formally launched in the All India Congress Committee meeting at Bombay However in his speech delivered after the Quit India resolution was adopted Gandhiji emphasized on certain points regarding the movement The following points made by Gandhiji are very important

1 He will try to meet the Viceroy before launching the movement
2 "A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committee can function When this happens, every man and woman, who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of general instruction issued Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India"
3 "Everyone of you should from this moment onwards consider yourself a free man or woman and act as if you are free I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom"
4 " We shall Do or Die We shall either free India or die in this attempt"

The rationality of the attitude behind the revolutionary activities in Medinipur was derived from these instructions issued by Gandhiji

This was an undeclared and unorganised movement, but it was marked by a very hard mood of struggle The instructions from Gandhiji indicated the methods and the ultimate goal of the movement

The whole of India had risen in revolt at the wake of the August Movement But Medinipur took some time to rise to the occasion The reasons for the delay are as follows

1 The leaders of the district did not get any concrete programme or directions

2 None of the All India Congress Committee members from Medinipur was able to attend the meeting at Bombay Consequently the leaders of Medinipur had to wait for programme and directions

3 Since the movement had begun suddenly the Medinipur leaders thought that it might not be advisable to plunge into the movement without making a proper assessment of the situation Under the conditions the Medinipur leaders took time to chalk out a programme for the movement

The activities of the preparatory phase were carried on both secretly and openly Some of the leaders had gone underground They tried to strengthen the organisation through group meetings and mass contact in the villages On the other hand the underground leaders began to build up volunteer corps with the youngmen recruited from the villages and made arrangements for their training The leaders who worked openly tried to consolidate the consciousness of the people and to prepare them psychologically for the movement through processions and meetings

However the preparatory phase of the movement had begun much earlier Preparations for a big movement were being made through the Individual Satyagraha in 1940 and the demonstrations against the Denial Policy In the Tamluk sub division a large corp of volunteers consisting of 50,000 veteran political workers and new recruits was built up for resisting the government's repression

Following this an army was raised for the Revolution The army was built up with the personnel selected from the volunteer corp and the students who had left their institutions at that time The army was known as the Bidyut Bahini The personnel of the Bahini were trained in drills and in guerrilla warfare The Bahini was divided into three departments, namely (1) the War department (2) the Intelligence department and (3) the Medical and Nursing department

The leaders of Medinipur held a meeting outside the district in Calcutta and evolved a programme for the entire district It was decided in the meeting that (1) the centres of administration and other centres of governmental activities all over the district would be attacked simultaneously and all links of communication would be destroyed before the attack is launched, (2) attempts will be

made to get as many people as possible involved in such actions The leaders were aware that it is not possible to continue the struggle for long without the sincere support of the people and their active participation Thus was the programme for the first phase of the movement No concrete programme for the second phase of the movement was prepared in the meeting But it was decided that the programme for the second phase will be determined by the activists themselves according to their own judgement of the local situation in the context of the developments of the first phase

As per the programme adopted in the meeting it was decided that attacks will be launched at 3 p m on the 29th September, 1942 (Later 29th September had come to be marked as the Revolution Day all over the district) Accordingly attacks were launched simultaneously on the administrative centres and the other centres of governmental activities all over the district The police stations in the different parts of the district were attacked by a large number of people In some cases the number of the persons participating in the action was even 50,000 Trained personnel and the veteran Congress leaders formed the vanguard in the attacks against the police station

In the night of the previous day i e, 28th September all links of communication were severed The telegraph and telephone posts all over the district were removed Breaches measuring between 25' and 50' in width and 10' to 15' in depth were made on the main roads The culverts were broken The big trees on the flanks of the roads were felled and barricades were made by these trees The earth dug out for making the breaches was removed to some distance so that the breaches might not be repaired easily All these were done under the cover of darkness during the night The people were amazed when they found these in the morning

The seriousness of the attacks on the police stations and subdivisional towns may be assessed by the following facts (1) 49 persons were killed by bullets and became martyrs on the 29th September (2) 13 persons were killed by bullets and became martyrs between the beginning of the August Movement and the 28th September (3) 30 persons were killed by bullets after the 29th September (4) Besides 30 persons were killed as a result of beating or maltreatment in the gaol The total number of the mar-

tyrs in Medinipur in the August uprising is 122 These figures alone testify to the intensity of the August uprising in Medinipur and the extent of the sacrifice made by the people of Medinipur. It is also remarkable that none among those who were killed by bullets was hit at the back They laid down their lives in open struggle in which they fought bravely They did not run away from the struggle like cowards

Referring to the movement in Medinipur a government publication entitled *Some Facts About the Disturbances in India* says, "In Midnapore in Bengal the operations of the rebels indicated considerable care and planning effective warning system had been devised, for instance, encirclement and flanking movements early on pre-arranged signals The forces of disorder were accompanied by doctors and nursing orderlies to attend the casualties and the intelligence system was efficient'

The above extracts from an official publication gives only a partial account of the extensive and well-planned preparations that the personnel of the Bidyut Bahini the Congress workers and the people of Medinipur had made This official statement also throws light on the manner in which the movement had begun

Gandhiji had come to Mahishadal in the Tamluk sub division on 25th December, 1945 and stayed there for five days i e till 30th December Gandhiji had come to Mahishadal to make an assessment of the movement in Medinipur He made enquiries about the developments during the movement. In the speech he delivered after completing the enquiries Gandhiji observed that the movement in Mahishadal in 1942 was spontaneous and courageous But in most cases the people had abandoned the path of non-violence (*Ananda Bazar Patrika 28th December, 1945*) The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported Gandhiji s speech under the following caption "Brave Move But Not Fully Non violent"

The second phase of the August Movement began with the establishment of the National Government There are five subdivisions in the Medinipur district In all previous movements the sub divisions had operated as distinct units of the district organisation In the August Movement also the sub divisions operated in a similar manner The organisations in the sub divisions worked either as National Government straight away or were guided

by the outlook of a National Government A National Government was formed in the Tamluk sub division In other sub divisions Swadhin Panchayet Parisads were established. These organisations ran independent administration

The second phase of the movement organised through the National Government is a most glorious chapter in the history of our Freedom Struggle The National Government of Tamluk called the Tamralipta Mahakuma Jatiya Sarkar was founded on the 17th December 1942 The Jatiya Sarkar was disbanded on September 1 1944 The organisational strength, administrative capabilities and the revolutionary spirit shown by the Jatiya Sarkar during this period is unparalleled in the history of British India

In order to appreciate the rationale of the Jatiya Sarkar and its success it is necessary to know the ideas which inspired the organisation and the activities of the Jatiya Sarkar

This National Government of Tamluk was established by the Congress It was decided that this National Government will be a sub divisional unit of the Mahabharatiya Juktarashtra i e, the Indian Union It was also decided that the sub divisional unit will be divided into thana (area under a police station) level Jatiya Sarkars The sub divisional Jatiya Sarkar will be headed by a Dictator He will be assisted by a council of ministers looking after the different departments of the government namely, external affairs finance, war, education publicity and public relations health, defence and justice The Bidyut Bahini and the Bhagini Sena will constitute the national militia The militia will be headed by a Commander-in chief The militia at the thana level will be placed under a General Officer Commanding and will have one or more commandants

Sri Satis Chandra Samanta was the first Dictator of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar He also held the charge of the external affairs department Sri Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyaya was the first finance minister Sri Susil Kumar Dhara was the Commander-in-chief of the Bidyut Bahini and of the Bhagini Sena He also held the charge of the War department The thana level Jatiya Sarkar also had a Dictator at the top and a council of ministers The Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar was inaugurated on December 17 1942 The thana level Jatiya Sarkars were formed on January 26, 1943

The reasons for the establishment of the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk and the objectives of the Jatiya Sarkar indicate that it was an effective organisation The declared objectives of the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk are the following

1) The sub division level Jatiya Sarkar will be a constituent of the *independent and sovereign Mahabharatiya Juktarashtra* But for the present the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk will operate as an independent government and will work in accordance with the aspirations of the people

2) If Japan attacks India the Jatiya Sarkar will resist the invaders as far as possible The foreigners will be compelled to transfer power to the independent sovereign National Government of India

3) Subhas Chandra Bose's escape from India and his efforts to carry on war against the British has given rise to a hope for freedom among the Indians If Subhas Chandra arrives in India the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk will welcome him and will cooperate with his forces by handing over power to him

4) The Jatiya Sarkar will carry on strugele against the British government and will try to disrupt its activities so that British power in India remains constantly harassed

5) The Jatiya Sarkar will maintain close relations with the people in continuing the movement The Jatiya Sarkar will work with the help and sympathy of the people and will serve the people and do its duty as far as possible

Another organisation called the Garamdal (extremists) had emerged parallel to the Jatiya Sarkar The British government was aware of the Garamdal and had made it illegal While the militia helped the Jatiya Sarkar in carrying out the day to day activities the Garamdal performed the violent revolutionary activities The Garamdal was the Action Squad The Action Squad physically liquidated the police spies who helped the government intelligence people by supplying them with information from the villages Thieves and dacoits who committed crimes with the help of the police and helped the police also received capital punishment Those who embezzled government relief funds or deprived the poor people were fined The rich zamindars who helped the British and such crimes as loot arson or rape of women committed by the police and the army were fined or the criminals im

imprisoned or sentenced to death according to the seriousness of the offence

Referring to these aspects of the movement Mr Fazlul Haq, then Prime Minister of Bengal said in course of a speech in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Midnapore had parallel Government with its military and police forces and intelligence branch, it had its jail where people were imprisoned, and in some cases, people had actually paralysed the Government"

The Bidyut Bahini and the Bhagini Sena have been referred to above Originally the Bahini had three departments, namely, (1) War department, (2) Intelligence department, and (3) Medical and Nursing department Later the set up was expanded with three additional departments namely, (1) Post and Public Relations, (2) Administrative and (3) Guerrilla

It will not be possible to appreciate the revolutionary character of Medinipur without analysing the reasons behind the violent activities during the August uprising Many people wonder why the August Movement had assumed revolutionary and violent form although the leaders of the movement were sincere Congressmen and believed in the principles of non violence propagated by Gandhiji

In view of the importance of the subject it is necessary to discuss the questions related to it

1) In the speech delivered after the adoption of the August resolution Gandhiji emphasized on the following features of the movement

(a) This is going to be final struggle for the Freedom of India

(b) Consider yourself a free man or woman and act as if you are free

(c) There is no resting place on the road which leads ultimately to independence

(d) It may not be possible to issue instructions Everyone must be his own guide

Although Gandhiji asked the people to adhere to the principle of non violence these pronouncements by Gandhiji had encouraged the struggling leaders and workers of Medinipur to determine the course of the movement according to their own judgement

2) The programme of the Congress Socialist Party and of Jayaprakash Narayan had inspired destructive activities

3) Kamala Debi Chattopadhyaya and Aruna Asaf Ali had tried to establish contacts with the leaders of Medinipur and supported the activities of the Jatiya Sarkar Kamala Debi had come to Medinipur during the movement

4) Gandhiji had supported the violent resistance movement which the people of Abyssinia had organised for self defence The leaders of Medinipur therefore considered it right to adopt violent methods for self defence

5) The killing of the 73 years old Matangini Hazra and of several youngmen in the wake of the August uprising had naturally led the people to adopt violent methods for resistance and for revenge

Besides the rape of women in the district and the deaths in consequence of the rape had goaded the people into extremist actions

6) Sri Satis Chandra Samanta, the first Dictator of the Tamraliptа Jatiya Sarkar is a disciple of the revolutionary monk Swami Prajnananda Although Sri Samanta was related to the non-violent struggle since 1920 the Swamiji's influence might have been active in his mind

7) Sri Susil Kumar Dhara the Commander-in Chief of the Bidyut Bahini was attached to revolutionary struggle when he was a student Consequently he was inspired by the ideals of revolutionary struggle

8) Sri Satis Chandra Samanta and Sri Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, who was the second Dictator, admitted that it was not possible for them to be dissociated with the revolutionary activities because the situation needed such actions

9) Medinipur had a long tradition of revolutionary activities Khudiram Satyen Bose and other revolutionaries had sacrificed their lives in the gallows Bagha Jatin and his associates had worked in this district As a result the youth of Medinipur were profoundly influenced by the tradition of revolutionary activities

10) The Congress organisation in the district of Medinipur was built up in 1920-21 by Desapran Birendranath Sasmal the uncrowned king of Medinipur who never submitted to injustice or repression All the movements had become successful in Medini-

pur The leaders of the August movement did not hesitate to adopt revolutionary methods for the success of this movement

Above all it should be remembered that the leaders and workers of Medinipur had engaged themselves in concerted actions and the people cooperated with them and helped them in their efforts This is why even Gandhiji the apostle of non violence, had to say in recognition of the merits of the struggle that the August Movement in Medinipur was spontaneous and glorious

NOTES

1 Satis Chandra Samanta *et al Two Years of National Government in Midnapore* Part I (1946)

2 Gopinandan Goswami *Bangiar Haldighat Tamluk* (1972)

3 Gopinandan Goswami *Medinipur Sahid Parichay* (1978)

4 Joges Chandra Basu *Medinipur Itihas* (1922)

5 *Biplabi* bulletin published by the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar—75 in number

APPENDIX

The following informations relating to the activities of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar and of the British Government during the August uprising in Medinipur will indicate the extensiveness and intensity of the movement

Activities of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar

1 The Judicial department of the Jatiya Sarkar had tried 2907 civil and criminal cases Besides a few cases were tried in the higher court of appeal and in the tribunal

2. Rs 79 000 were spent for defence and public health

3 Activities in the field of education (a) Granted financial assistance to many primary schools and (b) spent money for libraries

4 About 100 persons were sentenced to death

5 More than 200 persons were imprisoned
6 Total amount of fine collected nearly Rs 70,000
7 Law and order Burglars, thieves and dacoits were suppressed effectively

Activities of the British Government

1 92 persons killed by police firing
2 30 persons died as a result of beating or in gaol
3 325 houses were burnt down
4 Nearly 200 women were raped
5 The number of persons arrested or detained exceeded 10,000
6 About 1,000 persons were made special police
7 More than 5,000 houses were looted
8 More than 40,000 houses were searched
9 More than 100 houses were forcibly occupied
10 More than 450 families were subjected to distraint
11 Total amount of punitive fine imposed Rs 3 10,000
12 Nearly 100 organisations were declared illegal
13 Total loss may be estimated to several millions of rupees

THE PEOPLES REVOLUTION BALURGHAT 1942

BIREN DE SARKAR

For a proper appraisal of the Peoples Revolution at Balurghat 1942 we must know and understand the social economic and political set up of the people in undivided Dinajpore district of North Bengal in the pre independent days We must also bear in mind of the nationalist struggles of the early thirties and the Kisan movement of the late thirties

In the prepartition days Balurghat was a Subdivision of Dinajpore district The administrative headquarter was in far off Dinajpore town To reach there from Balurghat one had to travel 10 miles to reach Hili Station and then to Parbatipore Junction by rail The alternative routes were via Kamarganj (32 miles) or via Ganganarayanpore (36 miles by cart)

It mainly comprised of a cluster of sleeping villages with poor peasants and semi nomad tribals Most of the lands belonged to Raja of Dinajpore and other smaller landlords Struggles and revolts had flared up many times and a number of clashes occurred between the landlords and the peasants both in the Court and outside of it (as seen in Adhiar and Tebhaga movements)

The countryside had once been covered with forests The main inhabitants residing here were scheduled castes—the Rajbanshis predominating and scheduled tribes viz Santhals Oraon and Mundas There were some Muslims also but very few caste Hindus lived in villages The picture will be clear if we consider that even now there is one Assembly seat and one Parliamentary seat reserved for the scheduled categories These scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were mainly poor agriculturists and peasants mostly share croppers The richer families of Caste Hindus and Mohamedans used to live mainly in towns The Rajbanshis and Oraons were simple industrious folk of independent spirit who prefer hard work to service or other occupations under others Living together from the distant past the tribals formed

a close knit society which stood together in all struggles, even against the influential Maharaja of Dinajpore Though these local tyrants existed in the area—difficulties of communication protected the people of Balurghat against the outside influence and encroachment on their ways of life

But this peaceful moffusil town woke up suddenly to find itself as district headquarters for British administrative convenience In the absence of educated intelligentsia it had to face literally an invasion of educated middle class from outside mostly East and North Bengal for manning the legal, medical and educational professions as well as in the fields of trade and commerce This influx of middle class educated people brought about a dynamism wide national outlook and spirit as well as leadership to the people of Balurghat On the other hand, it also brought about in its wake—a further degree of exploitation of the agricultural people which in due course became landless proletariat This fact intensified the Kisan movement which later came into direct confrontation with the zamindars and the Government

Among the outsiders the largest contingent came from Vikrampur (Dacca district) First and foremost was Dr Chandra K Chattopadhyay—who came here as Government Medical Officer and settled there after retirement His sons Suresh Ranjan, Dr Sushil Ranjan and Late Saroj Ranjan became prominent citizens of Balurghat town and Subdivision and provided outstanding leadership in the national upsurges during 1930-32 and in 1942

Workers of the different Revolutionary groups in Bengal also came here One of them was Dr Harendra Lal De Sarkar of Dacca Anusilan Samity who was externed from Dacca by Police Order Another notable figure was Debendra Nath Bandyopadhyay—founder of Revolutionary Socialist Party He came with his uncle Umesh Chandra Bandyopadhyay—an Advocate by profession

Thus Balurghat naturally made notable contribution to the armed Revolutionary struggle also The Hili Mail Robbery Balla Dacoity and similar acts led to the trial conviction and deportations of Ramkrishna Sarkar Ramesh Samajdar, Sheikh Gamuddin Sarkar Kumudlal Ghosh Harendra Nath Mandal Kiron Chandra De Upendra Mandal Late Kripanath De, Nitya Chaudhury and others to Andaman Cellular Jail Those held in detention without trial by Government order during 1930 38 in

Balurghat Subdivision fanned the spirit of militant nationalism there

To revert to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the Rajbanshis of Tepokhania in Patnitola P S of Arjunpur and Shadi Tilon in Tapan P S the Rajbanshis and Oraons of Morabhanga in Posta P S had in the course of their struggles against the zamindars grown to be intensely politically conscious Late Pitambar Mondal Fulchand Mondal, Purneswar Burman, Basanta (Kharbania) Mondal, Balu Burman, Ghana Mondal, Sania Oraon, Bunde Oraon, Baidyanath Oraon Chandia Mondal, Ganesh Burman, Rasoraj Burman Jatadhar Burman Ganguram Oraon, Rupkanta Mondal, Somra Oraon and also Suren Samajdar will be remembered for ever for their fighting roles in the mass national struggles of 1932 and 1942 They had worked in close co operation with leaders such as Abinash Bose, Ex-M.L.A Late Kali Narayan Sanyal Suresh R Chattopadhyay Dr Sushil Kr Chattopadhyay, Harendra Lal De Sarkar, Saroj Ranjan Chattopadhyay, Smt Prova Chattopadhyay, Smt Bela Chattopadhyay and others Most of them are now dead

We shall now take up the story of the Peoples Revolution of 1942 at Balurghat War had been furiously raging between the English and the Germans in the West and between the Japanese and the Anglo Americans in the East Japanese bombers were making sorties over the skies of Bengal The Matriculation Examination had to be postponed by months in consequence, as Calcutta and the industrial towns were considered unsafe

In 1941 occurred the disappearance of Netaji Subhas from India and the imprisonment without trial of the Forward Bloc Workers and followers of Netaji The organisation Forward Bloc was banned by the Government The Workers or their party were intent on administering a severe blow to the British rulers The Second World War had entered a critical phase

On August 9, 1942 the Government of India put under arrest the members of the working committee of the Indian National Congress after Mahatma Gandhi issued a declaration calling upon the British to quit India and urging the Indians to launch and participate in a 'Do or Die' struggle and thereby raising a revolutionary flood-tide all over India

At this hour following the nation's call leaders of the Congress at Balurghat held a closed door meeting and decided to launch a

strong movement at Balurghat also Nightly meetings were held at the Congress strong holds in the villages also Leadership was entrusted to Saroj Ranjan Chattopadhyay with Biswa Ranjan (alias Kanu Sen) Sailendra Sundar Das Late Abdul Jobbar Mia Pulin Behari Dasgupta to assist him Shri Biren De Sarkar was given charge of the youth and the student sections of the area

The task of organising the Congress strongholds in the villages fell to M/s Late Pitambar Mondal Fulchand Mondal Basanta (Kharbaria) Mondal Purneswar Burman Ghoure Mondal Kholat Mondal Raghunath Burman Chandu Mondal Rasoraj Burman Jatadhar Burman Ganesh Burman Sania Oraon Bundu Oraon Baidyanath Oraon Biru Burman Kalikanta Roy Shri Gaju ram Oraon and Sumra Oraon and other local leaders

The tribal Santals had rather been excluded in the 1942 movement at Balurghat One reason was that the British Government had been keeping special watch over them in various ways through Deshmajhis at the Village level and Parganites at the Union and Thana levels The Christian Missionaries too had penetrated among the Santal people there Even so the Santals did not lack patriotic spirit

On the other hand another factor played its part in furthering the mass revolutionary upsurge at Balurghat in 1942 It had been passing through a severe drought which had affected the people at Porsha Patnitola Tapan Dhamairhat and Balurghat and raising the spectre of famine stalking the country Monday September 14 1942 (Bhadra 28 of the Bengali year) was decided to be the day for launching direct struggle and capture of the town and preparations were made a month before the fixed date for the mass struggle ahead

Instructions were issued that participants in the direct action would assemble at the Fatepur Bhangighat (ferryghat) from the evening Accordingly volunteers allotted for duty at the ferryghat started reaching there from late afternoon and were received by Biswa Ranjan Sen and Sailen Das They got together the ferry contractor and the boatman for talks and then kept them confined inside a house with a view to unauthorised crossing of the river by the volunteers

At about 9 p m on September 13 late Saroj Ranjan Chattopadhyay arrived at Bhangighat (Fatepur ferryghat) together with

Abdul Jobbar Mia and Sri Biren De Sarkar and ordered that those who wanted to cross the river to the other side, would have to be counted before they boarded the ferryghat The motive behind was to prevent leakage of information about the coming peoples march next morning Sailen Das and Biren De Sarkar managed to take across some people over the flooded river but they realised that the ferrying of the expected multitude would require the professional expertise of the ferrymen and so Saroj Babu released the boatmen and utilised their services

Counting, however continued So far as can be remembered today, up to the early hours of the morning (Sept 14, 1942) about 7000 Rajbanshis, 3000 Oraons and about 1000 More had gone across the river carrying long poles etc The Oraons mostly carried bows and arrows as in similar occasion

About the same time, handbills were distributed in the streets and lanes of Balurghat town asking ordinary townsfolk to observe hartal that day and warning them not to come out of doors except in case of emergency needs such as obtaining medicines for patients and baby foods

There were several shops owned by Mussalman traders from Dacca who had defied the directives mentioned in the handbills and opened shops But the slogans shouted by thousands of people, and the sound of clashing poles afar alarmed them and they immediately put down the shutters and went away

At 7 00 a m on Monday morning late Saroj Ranjan the leader of the Peoples' Revolution at Balurghat in 1942 took his stand on a raised plot on the eastern bank of the Atreyi river and addressed the people assembled for the procession "Those who feel afraid to participate in the procession and in the direct struggle at Balurghat may go back only those who do not fear death for the cause of the country should come along Our slogan for the day will be 'Victory to Free India 'Do or die and Bande Mataram' "

Saroj Ranjan led the marching multitude from the front closely followed by Sri Sailendra Sundar Das and Late Abdul Jabbar Mia Shri Biren De Sarkar had charge of the procession from the rear With slogans of 'Swadhin Bharat ki Jai, 'Do or Die lustily voiced by the marching thousands and thousands of poles beating in unison, the procession rushed triumphantly towards Balurghat town

As it reached the town batches of youths and students lined up with the marchers First they laid a seige of the Treasury at Balurghat The armed police in charge took kneeling position with their bayonets and guns aimed at the processions and warned Fire will be opened on you if you do not move away within 30 seconds Saroj Ranjan came forward and offered his chest for the first volley At this moment the Court Inspector appeared on the scene and asked Saroj Ranjan about his intention Saroj Ranjan replied I want food for the starving multitude The Court Inspector thereupon requested Saroj Ranjan to accompany him to the Government godown where food grains were stored Thus the Balurghat Treasury escaped looting

Led by Shri Biren De Sarkar and Gajuram Oraon the processionists then ransacked Balurghat Post Office destroyed the Telegraph apparatus Another batch led by Sri Sailendra Sundar Das raided the Balurghat Out Agency Petrol station seized 16 drums of petrol They then proceeded to set fire to the Registration Office the Civil Court the Central Co operative Bank etc tore to shreds the Union Jack flying over the S D O Court and raised over it the tricolour National Flag and made a declaration that Balurghat was free from that day The telegraph wires cut 16 or 17 offices of the Government were destroyed the Government grain store containing paddy rice mustard etc in the town and at Tatepur Bhangi ferryghat were raided The students and youths of Balurghat showed great courage and promptitude in these feats

The processionists then went back to their respective villages Gurkha and Garwali soldiers together with some British poured into Balurghat town by the Government order The campaign leaders Saroj Ranjan Kanu Sen Sailen Das Biren De Sarkar Abdul Jobbar Mia Radha Mohan Mohanta and a few others took cover and went underground The Government soldiers searched every house of the town and sent to Dinajpore District Jail all they could lay their hands on Those the Government failed to arrest were punished by destroying all their belongings (utensils beddings food) which were taken out to the court yards trampled under foot set on fire by pouring kerosene

The armed constabulary also spread out to the villages and atrocities committed compelling the women folk to go into hid

ing Thus armed police surrounded the house of Fulchand Mon dal at Moradanga village and arrested him When they started torturing their captives the men of the village retaliated and it was the turn of the armed police to find themselves over run and surrounded by the villagers bearing poles and spears But the police soon got reinforcement and the villagers had to see themselves being outnumbered A large number of Rajbanshis and Oraons were arrested and taken to Dinajpore District Jail on the occasion Next day freedom fighting villagers faced the rifle carrying police force with bows and arrows again at Parilahat The confrontation led to the killing of two police officers and two freedom fighters namely Chaita Burman and Eta Oraon Four or five others got wounded In another action the freedom fighters looted paddy and rice at Tilighat and at Madamahar

The mass revolt led to the arrest and imprisonment of over a thousand villagers about the same number went into hiding Many of the arrested persons were let off within 6/8 months because of the failure of the Government to obtain evidence against them Many were released by the Special Magistrate appointed by the High Court to try the cases And some of the accused were given rigorous imprisonment ranging from one year to a year and half

The heroes of the Peoples Revolution at Balurghat in 1942 Late Saroj Ranjan Chattopadhyay and Sri Sailendra Sundar Das came out of prison after August 15 1947 Shri Biswa Ranjan Sengupta and Late Abdul Jobbar Mia were convicted by the Special Magis trate and sentenced to 7 years RI and 2 years RI respectively Besides those mentioned in this write up Rajbanshi and Oraon freedom fighters had remained absconding for years together

In the history of Indian s Fight for Freedom the story of the Peoples Revolution at Balurghat in 1942 is sure to occupy a special place

ANTI IMPERIALIST UPSURGE ASSAM 1942 43

RAMESH CH KALITA

The long drawn out struggle for Indian independence had in every phase its repercussions in Assam since the first war of Indian independence in 1857 Here an attempt is being made to study the anti imperialist upsurge that took place in Assam during the five years from 1942 to 1947 This phase of the freedom movement in Assam is replete with heroic deeds of her sons and daughters and was highlighted by mass participation of students youths and rural folk including women in large numbers

To begin with the All India Congress Committee met at Bombay on 7th and 8th August 1942 to approve of the July 14 resolution of the CWC on Quit India While approving the resolution the AICC categorically stated that it is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against an imperialist and authoritarian government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity The Committee resolves therefore to sanction for the vindication of India s inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non violent lines on the widest possible scale so that the country might utilise all non violent strength it has gathered during the last twentytwo years of peaceful struggle Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken ' The resolution also cautioned the people that A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people and when no Congress Committees can function When this happens the resolution declared every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself within the four corners of the general instructions issued Every Indian

who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India

As it was apprehended Gandhiji Nehru Azad and all other top-ranking Congress leaders were arrested on 9th August In Assam too the president of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee Md Tayebullah Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Bishnu Ram Medhi Debeswar Sarmah Dr Harekrishna Das and Lila Dhar Baruah were arrested on the same day under the Defence of India Rules On their way to Assam from the Bombay Congress Gopinath Bardoloi and Sidhinath Sarmah were arrested at Dhubri In this predicament the masses acted according to their own understanding of the nature of the supposed Congress programme K N Dutt opines that the masses left to themselves decided their own line of action and they initiated a struggle of such tremendous magnitude that at least for a few months the regular functioning of the provincial government was made almost impossible In *Rebel India* too it is stated No guidance no direction no programme from the Congress leaders the people rose in rebellion spontaneously to give the final death blow to the British Imperialists Justifying the initiative taken by the Nowgong D C C for participation in the movement Purna Chandra Sarmah wrote in his diary 'Sometimes there were heated discussions as to the authority for the present movement My contention has been that before the arrest of leaders the trend of speeches and writings of Mahatma and other leaders had been to ask us to stand by the guns and if the Mahatma and the Congress Working Committee had failed in their negotiation with the Government they would advise us to start the movement and the movement would duly begin But since the leaders were arrested before negotiations and the Government took up the offensive our duty was to reply by a movement on our own responsibility and that was the position of the Congress Working Committee on August 9 1942 Realising that is the position we in Nowgong D C C took up the responsibility and started the movement in our district immediately

With the arrest of the Congress leaders of national standing

the leadership of the movement immediately passed into the hands of the Congress Socialists The Congress Socialists included, among others Mrs Sucheta Kripalani Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Ram Nandan Mishra Achyut Patwardhan Sadiq Ali etc They helped organise an underground resistance movement and with that end in view established an underground cell of the AICC at Cathedral Street Bombay, known as the Central Directorate of the AICC The impact of these Congress Socialists on their counterparts in Assam was no less important so far as the mass upsurge of this period was concerned Ideologically the Congress Socialists did not believe in the Gandhian principle of non violence as the only means of attaining national independence Therefore they put emphasis on the cult of violence for the struggle of freedom The Communist League of Saumendra Nath Tagore (later rechristened as RCPI) and Forward Bloc too participated in the movement with renewed vigour and determination The Gandhian creed of non violence was as much an anathema to them as to the socialists of Jayaprakash Narayan Therefore the lead rless Congress masses in many places of Assam came under their influence and direction" Some Gandhian die-hards too were won over to this line of thinking and thus made the participation of the masses an issue of common feature during the period under review

Another factor which helped in the mass participation of the people in the movement was the Santi Sena organisation With a view to meeting the situation that may arise in the war years the Congress Organisation in Assam made an elaborate plan for building up an efficient Santi Sena force The work for the organisation of this Santi Sena was started in 1941 under the instruction of the then Congress Presiden Md Tayebullah Leading Congress workers of their respective districts were entrusted with the specific task of organising the Santi Sena Thaneswar Gogoi Jogesh Chandra Mahanta Jogeswar Baruah in North Lakhimpur Khagendra Nath Nath Durga Prasad Rai Gajendra Chandra Nath Ganga Charan Patgiri Purnananda Sarkar Nimaichand Dutta Baruah Sardar Bairam Singh* and Dalbir Singh Lohar in Goalpara Purna Chandra Sarmah,

* Externed from Dibrugarh H/Poll F No 29/16/42

Basudeb Borthakur, Uma Phukan, Mohan Das Bangshi Sarmah, Mohan Saikia, Duttaram Saikia, Bhabananda Aditya Arun Chandra Sarmah, Ghanakanta Raja Lakshmi Prasad Goswami, Mahendra Nath Hazarika in Nowgong, Nabin Kalita Hareswar Sarmah, Santi Deka, Bharat Sarmah, Jogen Bhatta Rabin Nabis in Kamrup, Gahan Chandra Goswami and Jyotiprasad Agarwala in Darrang took much pain in organising the Santi Sena force Hundreds and thousands of youths and students all over the province became volunteers of this organisation

K N Dutt estimated the number of these Santi Senas to be 20,000 in the district of Nowgong alone This, according to Benudhar Kalita, is an exaggeration Almost 1448 Santi Senas were trained in 59 camps in the Lakhimpur subdivision For an effective organisation of this force, Congress stalwarts like Gopinath Bardoloi, Dr Bhupaneswar Baruah, Md Tayebullah, Rajendra Nath Baruah, Harinarayan Baruah, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Mahikanta Das and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed visited several places throughout the length and breadth of the province Though organised presumably as a peace preservation body, this Santi Sena force provided the much-needed mass basis of the great upsurge of 42 and helped sustain the movement for a longer period in Assam in comparison to other provinces In many instances the Santi Sena volunteers braved police repression and worked for hindering the allied war efforts, thereby causing much anxiety to the authorities

From the initial stage, Government did not fail to view with awe the coming up of the Santi Sena organisation In a Government report it was stated "The formation of Santi Sena Dals is proceeding and training camps are proposed by Congress organisers but it is not yet clear whether the appeal is likely to produce substantial effects The plans for drill of a military nature by these bodies are being watched carefully" Again with the spread and multiplication of this organisation in Nowgong, Kamrup and Darrang it 'became a source of danger to the Government

This Santi Sena force apart, the students had played a timely role in the movement With their participation, it became easier for any programme, Congress sponsored or otherwise, to reach

the masses of the people Incidence of students participation in the movement was tremendous during the months of August and September Students in large numbers jumped into the struggle regardless of penalties that were inflicted on them Reporting on students participation in the movement Viceroy Linlithgow wrote to the Secretary of State for India Amery

The volume of revolutionary propaganda spread through out the country by communist and other organisations combined with the nationalist and anti British preachings of Congress has had a cumulative effect on the educated and impressionable youth of the country

On 15th August the students at Goalpara town took out a procession in protest against the arrest of Congress leaders The police made a lathi charge on and bayonetted the processionists as a result of which nine persons were injured Four others were arrested for violating prohibitory orders The procession was led by Sailaja Kanta Basu Being provoked by this police repression thousands of rural folk as well as town dwellers thronged the Chawk Bazar The police and armymen did not dare come out from the barracks on that night On the following day a mass meeting of several thousand people was held at Krishnai Bazar which was addressed by Jogendranath Nath and Sardar Bairam Singh This helped the spread of revolutionary fervour among the masses People attacked the police stations at Dudhnoi and North Salmara set fire to the Inspection Bungalows at Agiya Krishnai and Bongaigaon as well as some school houses and cut off telegraph lines Even the post office at Dudhnoi was set on fire Police officials had stayed away from the police stations of Dudhnoi and North Salmara in fear of peoples attacks for days together The vendors at Abhayapari Bazar did not sell anything to Government servants for some twenty days With a view to putting obstructions to the movement of police and military vehicles the people barricaded the Trunk road from Krishnai to Dhupdhara with logs of Sal wood The movement in Goalpara was organised led and strengthened by the Santi Sena volunteers

During the August movement of 1942 Sardar Bairam Singh, Dharanidhar Das and Chandraprava Saikiani had done some

spadework in the Bilasipara area of Goalpara A mass meeting was held at Bilasipara under the presidentship of Sardar Bairam Singh The students of five schools had been on strike and held processions for several days One Narendra Bhattacharjee prepared a blueprint for sabotage activities in the Bilasipara area to be completed by the 15th of August The plan, with the exception of cutting off telegraph wires, fell through because of the arrest of Bhattacharjee and one of his comrades going underground It is on record that even elephants were used to pull down telephone lines and posts in Goalpara district

Immediately after the arrest of national leaders, the students at Bajali started to desert schools en-masse and went on strike College students, studying elsewhere, too joined them soon In the initial stage, their primary functions were to stage picketting, take out processions, propagate Congress programmes and help deliver the Congress mail They even swelled the ranks of the Santi Sena force of the locality To guide and lead the entire student community of the locality in the struggle for freedom, Bhabananda Dutta and Surja Kanta Chowdhury were appointed leader and assistant leader respectively As elsewhere, government establishments became the target of attack in Kamrup Even the residential houses of government servants and collaborators were not spared The military aerodrome under construction since July 1942 at Sapna in Sorbhog was attacked and destroyed by a crowd of several thousand people led by Braja Nath Sarmah in the night of the 26th August With it perished all the building materials, like thatch and bamboo collected by the MES contractors The same was the fate of three vehicles of MES an Inspection Bungalow, several MES quarters and many labourers' sheds Road communication leading to Sorbhog was destroyed by burning down all the bridges from Pathsala to Howli so as to prevent military or police help coming from outside In the same night the Sorbhog police station too was burnt by the people

On 28th August a mass meeting of about ten thousand people was held at Chamta in Kamrup district Among others Prabhat Chandra Sarmah a student who left the Benaras Hindu University after deserting his studies to participate in the movement—addressed the meeting He led a big anti British procession of

about fifty thousand people in Nalbari in the first week of September The procession was the first ripple of the Quit India movement in that area As elsewhere, there too the students acted as the vanguard of the freedom movement They formed, so to say, the nucleus of the mass action

Similar anti British mass meetings and processions during the month of August took place also in Nowgong district A mention may be made of the meetings held at Berhampur on 9th August, at Nowgong town and Kaliabor on 11th August at Laukhowa on 14th, at Puranigudam on 15th, at Raha on 18th, at Rangapara on 19th (attended mostly by peasants and tea garden labourers) and at Hatichung Saulkhowa on 22nd August The meeting at Berhampur was attended by at least two thousand Santi Senas and more than three thousand people including women The meeting at Nowgong town on 11th August attended by five thousand Santi Senas, was preceded by a complete and successful hartal In view of this attitude of the people towards the Raj the official circle reacted sharply and arrested the prominent Congress leaders of the district Haladhar Bhuyan Nowgong D C C president was arrested on 13th, Purna Chandra Sarmah on 23rd and Mahi Borah, Mati Ram Borah and Bimalakanta Borah on 24th August From 23rd August the revolutionary fervour of the people took a serious turn when the Nowgong D C C decided to have recourse to sabotage and subversive activities, with Mahendranath Hazarika as "dictator"

The students of Darrang district plunged into the movement at an early stage The Santi Sena force was mainly manned by them Prominent students and youths who had actively participated in the movement were Deben Borkataki, Bhumi Barmudai Kula Hazarika Biren Barkataki Golok Rajbangshi Chandra Borah Poyal Baruah Tilak Kakati, Keshab Mahanta, Maheswar Borah, Bijoy Sarmah, Biswadev Sarmah Jiten Bhuyan Durga Goswami Chandra Kanta Deka etc Some young teachers of the Sootea High School namely Mahendra Borkataki, Biman Borah, Baloram Bormudoi and Dimseswer Hazarika had actively helped and guided the students As the movement gained momentum, the Government arrested veteran Congress leaders like Kamakhya Prasad Tripathi, Bijoy Chandra Bhagabati and Mahikanta Das on 16th August During the month

of August the movement remained confined to the usual programme of hartals picketings and processions With the arrest of the senior leaders of the Congress, the guiding and controlling power of the movement passed into the hands of the younger leaders, viz Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Gahan Chandra Goswami They immediately went underground to guide the movement towards sabotage activities throughout the district Jyotiprasad Agarwala was the in-charge of the Santi Sena force of the district Under his leadership, this Santi Sena really became a force to be reckoned with by the Government Later he became the leader of the All Assam Santi Sena force at the peak of the movement when sabotage, subversive activities and incendiarism were the order of the day Under the guidance of Hem Baruah, a provincial Congress leader, then ailing in his sick bed, Agarwala led the Santi Sena to hinder the British war efforts throughout the length and breadth of the province

The people of Lakhimpur reacted sharply to the arrest of the national leaders and expressed their indignation against the British Raj through hartals, picketings and processions In pursuance of the decision of a meeting of Congressmen held in the residence of Hemchandra Hazarika, Secretary, Lakhimpur DCC a hartal was observed in Lakhimpur town on 11th August As a result of joint efforts of Congress workers and students, another hartal was observed on 13th August in the same town and its suburban areas From then on, students in large numbers started to desert schools and plunge in the movement, the initiative being taken by some of the students of North Lakhimpur Government High School The students of Bardoloni M E School, Bardoloni M V School Shilamara M V School, Dhal-uakhana High School Lohit Dikrong High School and Uttar Lakhimpur Government Aided Girls High School followed soon With the participation of the students, the movement assumed an all-pervading character throughout the district It provided the much needed link between the organisational network, spearheading the movement, and the masses of the people Through the students it became easier for the Congress plan and programme to reach the masses within a short period of time

Police repression on a procession in the Lakhimpur town on

22nd August resulted in a fresh spurt of students protest, hartals and processions the following day In the face of mounting police repression, gradually the leaders started to go underground to sustain the movement The centres of this underground revolutionary activities in North Lakhimpur were at Telahi, Kamalabari, Bihpuriya, Dhalpur and Bardoloni

In the district of Sibsagar the anti British upheavals became manifest through protest meetings, hartals, processions and picketting– participated both by students and general public Picketting in the educational institutions was initiated by the students of J B College right from 10th August This was followed by other students in the educational institutions of Jorhat, Sibsagar Amguri, Nazira and Golaghat The Jorhat District Students Convention even raised a demand for early vacation of all buildings of educational institutions occupied by the armed forces In Dibrugarh, students activities were checkmated in the initial stage by the arrest of their leaders

The movement in the Surma valley was "mostly a movement of the students' As elsewhere, in the Surma Valley too, "students played an important role and near about 1200 of them were arrested and imprisoned In the Hailakandi Sub-division, the students acted as the vanguard of the movement Among the students, Watir Ali Barbhuyan and Sunil Kanta Dev were most active Many people, including students, had to face incarceration because of their participation in the movement

The August movement had its reverberation in the Shillong hill top too On August 19 a secret meeting of several group leaders was held within the cantonment area The leaders represented the various ethnic groups in Assam viz Khasis, Nagas, Garos, Nepalis, Manipuris, Assamese, Bengalis, etc It was decided in the meeting to form a fighting force under the name of Free India's Fighting Force (F I F F) with a supreme Commander at its apex The Action Committee formed also in this secret meeting drew up a plan 'to paralyse the administration and to obstruct the movement of military and police to blow up bridges and cut telegraph and telephone lines" With a view to achieving these objectives, 'workers were sent to the countryside to launch campaign against recruitment to the military departments An intelligence department was organised to

watch the movement of the military and police Garo, Naga, Nepalee and Manipuri workers were deputed to organise the tribal areas with necessary instructions The women members of the F I F T even organised Red Cross and First Aid Parties"

It becomes evident from the foregoing account that the initial stage of the August movement in Assam was marked by hartals, processions, mass meetings and picketings in government offices and educational institutions with a sprinkling of sabotage activities here and there The movement, so to say, remained all through peaceful But with the arrest of leaders, the leadership of the movement in Assam passed into the hands of the younger leaders of the Congress and most of them came immediately under the spell of the underground revolutionary cell set up by the Congress Socialists at Bombay Their plans and programmes caught the imagination of the younger leaders of Assam This group of leaders included, among others, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Gahan Chandra Goswami, Lakhmiprasad Goswami, Mahendra Nath Hazarika Sankar Chandra Baruah, Lakshyadhar Chowdhury, Girin Chowdhury, Rabin Nabis and several student leaders Faced with police repression, they went underground so as to sustain the movement and lead it to the ultimate goal of independence From the beginning they deviated from the Gandhian principle of non violence and peaceful agitation, preached the cult of violence and held every means conceivable fit for the attainment of Swaraj They were even blessed by the veteran Gandhites and Congressmen like Gopinath Bardoloi and Tyagbir Hem Baruah—the Congress president Rajani Kanta Goswami has stated that after the arrest of other leaders, the movement took the nature of an underground one and Tyagbir Hem Baruah conducted the movement from his sick bed with the help of the students and youths 'Hem Chandra Baruah sent Harendra Nath Baruah and Nabin Goswami as his emissaries to Nowgong and Upper Assam, respectively with instructions and a small fund for distribution among the underground activists Sadiq Ali the office Secretary of the AICC—during his visit to Assam as Anil Babu in the early part of the movement -advised the Congress workers at the Congress office in Gauhati to go underground and proceed with the sabotage activities '

In the Goalpara district, the sabotage activities proceeded with the circulation of a large number of leaflets and handbills, both printed and lithographed under the signature of Jayaprakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta and Aruna Asaf Ali The residence of Dr Narendra Nath Bhattacharjee was the centre of discussion for the underground activists like Braja Sarmah Jogen Nath Pratulla Chakraborty Haricharan Das, Nidhu Das etc The sabotage activities were concentrated mainly on the disruption of communication and transport system with a view to hindering the Allied war efforts Bridges on the Jogighopa Chapaguri road were burnt on 12th September Records and telegraph wires of the Dhubri Railway Station were damaged on 3rd October The Bazar at Basugaon in Goalpara was looted on the same day Dotmahat, Bhawraghurhat and Ramphabil Bazar were looted during October 14-16 Dotmahat was looted and destroyed by a crowd of 4,000 people In 1943 a 5000 strong crowd obstructed the road communication by digging a trench on the present day National Highway near Amarsarbhil in Goalpara district in order to prevent the movement of Allied forces

With the growing participation of the masses in the movement and its taking a serious turn, police repression befell on them heavily Imposition and collection of punitive taxes was pursued with unprecedented severity in the district Altogether, punitive taxes were imposed on 23 villages of Goalpara district In Kalira village, the police resorted to firing in a bid to collect a mere sum of Rs 8 from one Nidhanu Rajbansi, as a result of which he was instantly killed inside his house A lance Naik too was killed accidentally who was standing just behind the house looking for an escape The incident was described in the official despatch as a 'Sydney Street Battle"

The underground resistance movement assumed a serious turn in the district of Kamrup In Bajali a Council of Action was formed with Dr Keshab Chandra Das as 'dictator', Nara Kanta Das as Secretary and Dharanidhar Das Chandraprava Saikiani Bhabananda Dutt, Dr Jina Ram Das, Dr Ananta Mohan Das and several others as members The Council met once or twice a week to decide the future course of action in conformity with the instructions from higher bodies At the

most there were thirtytwo secret revolutionary cells at Bajali Even a parallel government was established there with a well calculated net work of civil judicial and financial departments under the direct supervision of the Council of Action The parallel government maintained a national fund, established a panchayat of judicature at each village with a central panchayat at its apex two jails at Chaukbuti and Kalaguri and kept strict vigil so that the rural products did not fall in the hands of the government servants The Santi Sena force was at the helm of affairs everywhere

Faced with mounting police repression a North Bank Co ordination Committee was floated for conducting the revolutionary activities in North Kamrup with Haladhar Chakraborty as leader The Committee consisted of 21 members—Pratap Goswami Sarbeswar Goswami Dantram Haloi Surendranath Sarmah Dr Prabhat Sarmah Purnaputi Dutta Kalicharan Chowdhury Karunakanta Bhattacharjee Debiram Barman Lakshmikanta Sarmah Umakanta Sarmah Dhantram Nazir, Surath Barman Chandra Talukdar Upen Sarmah Khagensen Deka Srikanta Barman Sushen Chowdhury Dharma Deka Dhaneswar Sarmah and Gopi Goswami etc As in Bajali Jails were established at Bondapara in Bolo and Baharghat in North Kamrup Government collaborators and other suspects were kept confined in these jails of the peoples raj Obstruction to the British war efforts was the main function of the Committee Among sabotage activities by this Committee mention may be made of the burning down of S D C s offices at Gauhati and Rangia and the Inspection Bungalows at Lokarghat and Muktapur

This underground revolutionary cell functioned under the constant and regular instruction as well as guidance from Lakshmi dhar Borah and Robin Nabis The latter acted as a liaison between this revolutionary group and Achyut Patwardhan and Aruna Asaf Ali This revolutionary group succeeded in completely destroying a goods train carrying petrol on a bridge (Hulikhali) in between Rangiya and Kendukona Railway Stations They even set fire to a huge dump of fodder grass collected to feed the military horses at Punni near Tihu Some activists of this revolutionary group lifted some six or seven guns through a single night attack on the houses of license

holders in the Dharampur Mauza of Nalbari It may be mentioned here that apprehending the use of private weapons against the Government during the movement, the Government seized private guns from license holders found to be hostile to the Government in the Bajali Circle Some 235 bicycles were also seized As a matter of fact, the movement was at its peak in North Kamrup A Government report says "Rumours of mass action on a large scale have been particularly rife in North Kamrup In protest against the indiscriminate killings of freedom fighters in Nowgong district, public meetings were held all over the province on 25th September In Bajali too, the Nowgong Day was observed with the holding of such public meetings at Chanbhuti, Nityananda, Bamunkuchi and Jalah In the meeting at Jalah three persons were arrested While they were being brought to the Patacharkuchi thana, the police party was attacked at several places by the people to get the arrested persons released The police resorted to firing thrice in Jalah, Rohabari and Nityananda, respectively, which resulted in injury to about ten persons and in the death of Madan Chandra Barman a student of the Bajali High School and Routram Das of Sadari village This ghastly killing of these two youths was enough to create a sensation in the area As a retaliation to this killing, the women of Bajali, numbering about three thousand, attacked the Patacharkuchi Thana on the following day The women were led by Sundaribala Das her daughter Ambika Das and Guneswari Patgiri etc The entire plan was masterminded by Dr Jinaram Das husband of Sundaribala Das, with the Council of Action helping him in turn The striking feature of the 42 movement in Assam was the participation of its women in their thousands Their role was on a par with that of men The authors of *Rebel India* truly write 'The struggle waged by Assam to break down the shackles of slavery is largely a struggle of Assam's womanhood—a credit which no other province of India can claim to the extent Assam does"

Some other underground organisations were also floated such as the Ahimsa Biplabi Sangha at Barpeta and the Hanuman Party at Jalah of Patacharkuchi in Kamrup district for the furtherance of the revolutionary activities of subversive nature

The general programme of open agitation did not cease even

..fter the starting of large scale activities of subversive nature Only in Kamrup was there much large scale or open agitation Picketing in that district continues and there have been sporadic efforts to establish a parallel administration And under the aegis of this parallel government a vigorous no tax campaign was started in several places of the district The campaign succeeded in the areas surrounded on the east by Pachim Borigog and extending westwards comprising the Nalbari Tihu and Bajali circles and ending with Bhowanipur in Barpeta in the west The Parallel administration idea is being fostered according to a Government report mainly for the purpose of making this campaign a success Some villages even refused payment of revenue en bloc Revenue collection was a complete failure in the Tihu and Nalbari circles till February 1943 Mauzadars were regularly threatened by the agitators and in view of such threats one Mauzadar had to be provided with police help The collection of revenue in 1942 stood at 85% as against 91% the previous year in the Sadar and 79% as against 89% earlier in the Barpeta Sub division It may be mentioned here that the houses of five mauzadars were burnt down in this subdivision

It has already been mentioned that the decision to undertake sabotage activities in Nowgong was taken on 23rd August 42 by the Nowgong D C C And in the same night some people removed the rails from the railway track just near the Kampur Railway Station This caused the derailment of some bogies along with the engine of a goods train On the next day the labourers sheds at the Phulaguri Railway Station were burnt down The removal of rails and fish plates near the Dimou bridge caused the derailment of a goods train In the night of August 24/25 rails were removed from the railway track in between Kampur and Jamunamukh stations and at Purnigudam Another goods train was derailed near Bebejia on 24th As the obstruction to the British war efforts was the main objective of the underground activities the transport and communication were severely paralysed particularly in the district of Nowgong Several road bridges on the Assam Trunk Road were also burnt down during the early days of the movement

After the arrest of the senior Congress leaders of the Nowgong D C C already referred to above, the younger leaders like Mahendra Nath Hazarika and Lakshmiprasad Goswami formed a war council Under the aegis of this war council the August movement in Nowgong assumed the character of a mass rebellion' almost from the beginning According to a government record 'The Inspector-general of police concluded that there was an atmosphere of rebellion, which pointed to a concerted plan, but that the lack of reliable intelligence was a severe handicap to the local officers' In view of such an alarming situation, the Government requisitioned the armed forces to guard the communication net-work in the district along with the local police However, this did not make any difference and the entire district was formed into the 'Midnapore of Assam

On 25th August a huge procession was taken out at Kampur Attempt at resisting the procession resulted in the assault on a government (British) official on duty After damaging his vehicle, the infuriated crowd on their way home, destroyed the railway station at Kampur, the local post office of the Tahsildar Jajari Post Office the Kathiatoli Inspection Bungalow and the Raha Circle Office, too, were destroyed almost at the same time by the people The wooden bridge at Bebajia was destroyed in the night of August 25/26 In the meantime a platoon of the Assam Rifles under Captain Flinch on their way from Gauhati to Nowgong reached Bebejia Finding the bridge destroyed, they started an indiscriminate attack and committed inhuman atrocities on the villagers at Bebejia An attempt by the P W D workers to repair the bridge was foiled by some Santi Sena volunteers And in the evening of the same day the military patrol party posted there fired on some suspected saboteurs resulting in the death of Kalai Koch and Hemoram Borah and in injuries to some others This killing resulted immediately in the open rebellion of the people of Raha Barpujia, Kapabora, Bhakat Gaon, Sonaruguri, Chiraibahi Jagi Rupahi, Marigaon, Kampur Hatichung Dhing Berhampur Kaliabor etc On the same day some Santi Sena volunteers were digging the approach road at one side on the historic Jungalbalahugarh preparatory to the destruction of the Dighalhati bridge The military patrol

party on duty instantly fired on the crowd and as a result, Hemoram Pator and Gunabhi Bardoloi fell dead at the altar of the motherland In the firing at Jungalbalahuarh some 15 to 16 persons were also injured The repeated attempts at the destruction of communication net work invited unheard of police repression To meet the situation Santi Sena volunteers were posted on the entrance to the villages to warn the people about the probable attack by the police or military In the night of 28th August the police from Raha with reinforcement of mili turymen from the district headquarters raided the village of Barpujia Tilak Deka, a Santi Sena volunteer was guarding the village on its entrance and at the approach of the armed forces. he blew his horn to warn the people about the imminent danger that was to befall The Captain fired on Tilak Deka from point blank range and he instantly fell dead for the cause of freedom of his motherland But this did not daunt the people s yearning for freedom They were now determined for sabotage activities on a wider scale The Insp ction Bungalow at Marigaon and Champanala a government office at Mahaha and many other government establishments were set on fire and destroyed Bridges on the Raha Marigaon road were set on fire and damaged

It was in this atmosphere of bitter indignation against the British that the Nowgong D C C decided to observe 16th Septem ber as the Panchabir Divas in memory of Kalu Kosh Hemo ram Borah Hemoram Pator Gunabhi B rdoloi and Tilak Deka. At Berhampur it was decided to celebrate the Panchabir Divas' on 18th September which synchronised with the reoccupation of the Santi Sena Volunteers Camp there Even in the midst of their gre it mortification the people at Berhampur organised a community feast to celebrate the occasion in the site of the Santi Sena Volunteers Camp While the people were feasting merrily there appeared on the scene armed troops led by a magistrate and two military officials The magistrate ordered the demoli tion of the camp and immediate dispersal of the people collected there At the refusal a tussle ensued in which Bhogeswari Phukanani in a bid to rescue her grand daughter Ratnaprava struck Flinch—one of the military officers—in the face with a

flag staff* Flinch immediately pulled the trigger of his revolver and Bhogeswari Phukanani, nearing 70 years of her age, fell flat in a pool of blood only to breathe her last on 20th September Three other Santi Sena volunteers—Thogiram Sut, Baloram Sut and Lakhi Hazarika died on the spot as a result of police firing

All these police and military atrocities led to complete demoralisation among the people in certain areas Therefore to boost the peoples morale as well as to fight the British imperialists to the finish a death squad was formed out of the most daring elements of the Santi Sena volunteers under the leadership of Mahendra Nath Hazarika and Lakshmiprasad Goswami The plan of action set forth by this group was the destruction of the communication net work—both rails and roads destruction of government offices and establishments and the houses of government collaborators destruction of school houses and murder of the police officials responsible for mass repression Very soon peoples enthusiasm was revived through the celebration of Gandhi Jayanti on 2nd October But what followed thereafter was the unheard-of police repression on the inhabitants of Marigaon and its neighbouring villages of Barangabari, Kahibari Jagi etc This provoked another series of mass actions which resulted in the burning down of the forest office at Jakhalabandha and the school buildings of Bebejia Kaliabor Puranigudam etc Huts and Bazars were closed down so that the purchase of rice became impossible for military consumption Even the incident like the forcible release of cattle meant for military consumption was reported from Nowgong district during this period

In order to counter mass action the Government now resorted to the imposition and collection of punitive taxes Raha was the first to be imposed with the punitive tax Police soon created a reign of terror to collect punitive taxes on the villages of Charaibahi Medhi Mayangiya Mikirbheta Saratbari, Owabari Kapaseri Bhakatgaon Kampur Atigaon Niz Kampur Telia Sayang, Pachanighar Hatichung Jajari, Chatial Pub Thana Jagi-

*Mahendra Nath Hazarika has mistakenly referred to one Numali Phukan as Bhogeswari's relation Hazarika pp 61 63

Manaha Barhampur Bherbheri Singiapotani Siyalekhati, Birahigaon Kamargaon etc

In a bid to engage in armed duel if necessary with the British forces and with a view to killing the police officials known for their excesses some 20 to 25 volunteers of the death squad led by Mahendra Nath Hazarika succeeded in forcibly lifting about 17 guns from the possession of private license holders of the district The guns were lifted from Kandali, Champamala Turabari villages and Nowgong town in the month of December It is stated in a government report that on the 5th instant at about 2 April 10/12 persons posing as Government officers took away two guns from the house of two ex tea garden coolies stating that the Deputy Commissioner had ordered the production of the guns at his camp for the renewal of their licences The guns disappeared Later it was reported that 12 guns had been stolen in a similar manner by persons posing as military personnel and also two bicycles And "five more guns removed on false pretences shortly before Christmas from Jahorighat Tarun Chandra Sarmah Kataki—a Daroga known for his excesses committed on the people was said to have been murdered by the volunteers of the death squad at Hatichung and a boy of Bherbheri suspected to be a government informer was consigned into the Kallang river after being packed in a hessian bag A third one was murdered at Kampur

To stem the tide of revolutionary activities of this group the Government declared prizes of Rs 10 000/ to persons capable of handing over Lakshmiprasad Goswami and Mahendra Nath Hazarika -dead or alive According to Hazarika, the amount of money set on himself by the Government was 2 000/- and on that of Goswami was 250/

Very soon there started to develop a rift in the underground revolutionary cell or death squad in Nowgong—between the faction supporting Goswami and the other backing Hazarika In a meeting held at Panigaon under the presidentship of Amalprava Das in December 1942 Goswami deprecated haphazard localised terrorism and condemned theft of guns arson etc" Hazarika sharply reacted to the criticism of Goswami and emphasised that in this last fight for India s freedom no method

however sinister could be questioned However on 15th February 1943 Mahendra Nath Hazarika was arrested along with his friends viz Benudhar Deka Mangaleswor Gogoi Bhadra Hazarika and Ananda Bhuyan Lakshmi Goswami evaded arrest worked for some days in upper and lower Assam and then went to Calcutta ostensibly for medical treatment With the arrest of Hazarika and the departure of Goswami to Calcutta the movement in Nowgong soon fizzled out During this movement about 1500 Santi Sena volunteers were arrested by the Government and about 1200 had to undergo varying terms of imprisonment However the movement was most intensive in the district of Nowgong—from the beginning to the end Of all the six districts of Assam the movement prevailed in most intense form in the district of Nowgong till Gandhiji's fast — opined the authors of *Rebel India*

Brisk preparations were made for conducting the movement with extensive sabotage activities in the Darrang district by the leaders of the underground factions Village defence was managed with the help of the Santi Sena volunteers Persons suspected to be British informers or collaborators were kept confined Establishment of panchayats for the settlement of village disputes was completed All these preliminary preparations were done with a view to establishing a parallel administration in the district The establishment of a parallel government by this group at Jamuguri and Sootea in the early phase of the movement was almost a success

In the Mangaldoi area the supply of commodities to the military for consumption was obstructed by the people Jeuram Deka Panuram Das and Tarkeswar Sarmah acted as dictator in turn for pushing the programme of sabotage activities with success The S D C office at Mangaldoi and some bridges on the North Trunk Road were set on fire and destroyed causing serious obstruction in the movement of military vehicles for several days On 9th September the women at Mangaldoi took out a procession and staged picketting in the court

The situation in the Darrang district was best depicted in a government report of the day "The whole area of the north bank from Mangaldoi to Golipur in North Lakhimpur (Sic)

is stated to be in a somewhat disturbed condition and the garden managements have been displaying some alarm owing to the interference by hands of Congress peasants (?) with isolated officials"

In the early part of September, the underground leaders in the district of Darrang held a secret meeting to chalk out the line of action to be undertaken by them The leaders present were, among others, Mrs Puspalata Das, Gahan Chandra Goswami and Jyotiprasad Agarwala Here Jyotiprasad Agarwala exhorted his comrades with all his patriotic fervour and eloquence to capture the local centres of British power and hoist the Congress flag The date for hoisting the flag was fixed on 20th September for different police stations and 21st September for Tezpur Sadar police station and Court One Jogesh Mishra from Bihar came to Tezpur and was guiding the movement of the underground factions during this crucial period He addressed two meetings of the volunteers of the Santi Sena and the 'death squad'—one at Bargaon in Dhekiajuli on 16th and the other at Barangabari on 18th September Mrs Puspalata Das accompanied him on both the occasions On the appointed day the volunteers of the Santi Sena and 'death squad' marched at the head of the long processions to their destinations The hoisting of the Congress flag on the Dhekiajuli police station devolved on the people of five mauzas viz Bargaon, Nahorbari, Missamari, Dhekiajuli and Borsala The procession of about five thousand people for the purpose was led by Kamalakanta Das Phanidhar Das and Bapuram Gogoi to the Dhekiajuli police station The Government report says that the people attending the Thana numbered about 2,000 In a bid to foil the attempt at hoisting the flag on the house top of the police station, the police resorted to firing which resulted in the death of Manbar Nath, Kumali Devi, Khabuti Devi, Ratan Kachari, Mahiram Koch, Tileswari Baruah, Maniram Kachari, Sarunath Chutia, Dayal Panua, Mangal Kurmi and Lerela Kachari The official version placed the dead at 8 and wounded at 12 However Manbar Nath created history by successfully hoisting the flag on the Thana house-top before he was fired at by the police Faced with police firing, the crowd dispersed pell-mell leaving the dead behind But on their way home, they were again mercilessly

attacked by the armed forces sent in to Dhekiajuli under Captain Flinch from Tezpur

At the Sootea police station, the hoisting of the Congress flag was done in the early morning by some stratagem and this helped in averting a definite clash between the police and the surging multitude at noon

While the volunteers and the police were engaged in a verbal duel in the Behali police station premise, a woman volunteer—named Tileswari Mahanta succeeded in hoisting the flag

The flag hoisting incident at Gohpur was as stormy and heroic as that of Dhekiajuli With a view to hoisting the Congress flag at the police station, thousands of people came in processions from two directions—one from Kalabari and Dubia under the leadership of Golok Chandra Pujari and the other from Barangabari and Helem under the leadership of Jonaram Bhuyan The processions—with a combined strength of 5000 people—proceeded to the Thana premise with deafening shouts of slogans like 'Down with British Imperialism, 'Swaraj is our Birth Right' etc Rebati Mohan Shome the O C of the Thana supported by his juniors prevented the processionists from entering the Thana premise But the processionists with their conviction to 'do or die'—were determined to go ahead with their mission One Bagi Kachari fired the first shot killing Kanaklata Baruah—a girl volunteer of the 'death squad'—with the flag in her hand This was followed by volleys of bullets on the processionists which resulted in wounding Mukunda Kakati (died afterwards), Hem Baruah—a school student, Khageswar Baruah, Thakeswar Rajkhowa and Bhola Bardoloi However in this atmosphere of excitement and commotion, a boy named Rampati Rajkhowa went up the Thana roof and planted the Congress flag there with the help of Prem Baruah, Girish Sut and Muhudhar Changmai

A similar attempt was made the following day i e, on 21st September, on the Tezpur Thana and the Court Police resorted to a lathi charge on the people collected at the Church Field for the purpose They started to disperse pell-mell and in the confusion thus set in, Jitendra Kumar Bhuyan hoisted the Congress flag in the Court premises to the surprise and admiration of all

Apprehending major trouble, Government prevented several thousands of processionists from entering the town area

This mass action of the people on the local centres of British power immediately invited police action on the remnants of the Congress leaders Mrs Puspalata Das was arrested on 20th September and Omeo Kumar Das and Mahadev Sarmah were arrested on the following day

With the flag hoisting programme coming to an end, the underground activists in the district held two secret meetings—one at Bhurgaon on 23rd October and the other at Kerampam on 9th November It was decided in both the meetings that the underground activists would, under no circumstances, come out in the open till the end of the movement In the meeting at Kerampam it was further decided to train some underground activists About 150 men were trained accordingly in a camp at Bessena near Tezpur

On 5th December the underground activists set fire to the S D C office at Tezpur, the Balipara Inspection Bungalow three military buildings at Parua near Tezpur, and a few days later the air-strip at Missamari was also set on fire Obstructions in the telegraph and telephone lines were frequent

With a view to liquidating the main bases of the movement the Government imposed collective fines and applied utmost rigour for its realisation Raiding of villages and committing atrocities on the inhabitants became the normal duty of the police and military almost throughout the district

The underground movement in Lakhimpur was not as much violent as it was in other districts of the province The industrial belt under the Dibrugarh sub-division was declared a 'protected area on 4th September, 1939 The entire area was rocked by violent labour strike in the year 1939 And hence this precautionary measure However acts of sabotage and incendiarism were reported from usual places of the Lakhimpur sub-division Among the targets set ablaze were the North Lakhimpur High School Dhakuakhana Forest Office Inspection Bungalows at Laluk and Garmur a wooden bridge at Dhakuakhana and the European Club House in the Lakhimpur town itself They set fire to the residence of the S D O Lakhimpur, P W D office at Lakhimpur Petrol tank at Lilabari Aerodrome, and cut off

telephone and telegraph wires and damaged bridges and vehicles On 9th September, the people at Dhalpur destroyed a British war-plane which crash-landed there This caused the administration to impose collective fines on the inhabitants of the area and about Rs 9,600/- were realised While collecting this fine, people were mercilessly tortured

Pitamber Dev Goswami of Garmur Satra had been there in the North Lakhimpur sub-division for about two months, i e, September and October He established his camp at Panigaon Namghar and guided the movement His very presence was enough to cause a stir among his orthodox disciples against the British The official report has this to say with regard to the Satradhikar's political role there "The activities of the Gossain of Garmur Satra (Monastery) were responsible for a dangerous situation arising in North Lakhimpur" And, therefore, the district authority had "decided to restrict this Gossain, who had embraced a career of political activity for the Congress or Kishan group during the last 20 years or so, to his Satra in Sibsagar district" Accordingly the Satradhikar was forcibly taken in a truck from Panigaon to his Satra by the S D O with the help of the armed police

At Dhalpur in North Lakhimpur, a procession of some 500 persons was dispersed by the Assam rifles and in the course of this action some ten people were injured Police repression of this kind created extreme provocation among the masses, and they worked for a concerted plan of action with a view to occupying the Sadar police station at Lakhimpur and the Bihpuria police station on 7th October Processions taken out for that purposes were dispersed by the police and many people were wounded In the night of 11th October people set fire to the house of a police informer

Use of private arms against the Government were highly apprehended and to ward off this menace, about 23 guns in the North-Lakhimpur sub-division were confiscated during this period Several Congress leaders too were arrested, Sarbeswar Baruah, Tirtheswar Hazarika and Ramesh Chandra Vidyarthi were arrested on 7th September

The underground activists were involved in large-scale

sabotage activities and incendiarism in the Sibsagar district during the months of October, November and December

The Dergaon police station was attacked by the crowds twice—on 7th and 8th September On 8th they succeeded in hoisting the Congress flag there They tried to put Gandhi caps on the heads of the policemen and succeeded in forcing the sub-deputy collector in the circle office to wear the Gandhi cap Government offices at Jorhat including the office of the SP were attacked by the people

On 14th the residence of the senior E A C and the High School at Sibsagar were set on fire and destroyed—the latter partially On 15th three huge processions leading towards the Sibsagar town were dispersed by police lathi charges A crowd with some women volunteers even attacked the Teok police station with an avowed aim of planting the Congress flag there on 27th September The processionists had to bear the heavy brunt of police lathi blows Ten persons were arrested and 15 bicycles were seized And on the 20th night a branch post office was also burnt

By the beginning of October, the underground movement in Sibsagar district had taken a new turn With the assumption of leadership of this underground resistance movement by Sankar Baruah, the sabotage activities in the Sibsagar district got a new fillip This underground revolutionary of the Jayaprakash-Lohia faction went from village to village organising the anti-British actions The organising capacity of Sankar Baruah was so menacing to the British that they could not rest contented until an award of Rs 10,000/- was made for anybody handing him over to the British

As in North Lakhimpur the Garmur Satradhikar soon estab lished himself as an eye-sore to the British in Sibsagar—the pontiff's home district And, therefore, he was "restricted to his monastery" "The Gossain of Bangenaati shows signs of dazzling in politics also", according to the government report Their role must have had some radical influence on their disciples prejudi-cial to the British However, under the direct control of the underground revolutionaries in Sibsagar district some war councils were also functioning specially at Golaghat and Jorhat

On 10th October the derailment of a train had taken place at Kashajan near Titabar The removal of fish plates and rails caused the derailment of a military special train at Sarupathar on the same day The sabotage in the Sarupathar rail track was the handiwork of some underground activists of Golaghat, viz Suren Phukan Ghanashyam Saikia Baikuntha Singh etc Kushal Konwar was hanged on 15th June 1943 for his alleged complicity in the Sarupathar rail sabotage activity Tanushyam Goswami along with some of his comrades planned the Lakwa rail sabotage and accomplished the same

Acts of incendiarism were widely resorted to by the underground activists in this district Four bungalows, one mauzadar's house, the European club at Golaghat and a railway station near Simalugun were set on fire and damaged in the Golaghat subdivision One Inspection Bungalow and some temporary buildings were also burnt in the Sibsagar sub-division The Assistant Manager's bungalow of the Daflating tea estate under the Titabar police station was burnt in the night of October 4/5 The Khamtai Railway Station was burnt and the Inspection Bungalow at Deragaon was partially damaged as a result of the burning incident About 80 women accompanied by Congress workers made an abortive attempt to attack the Teok police station A wooden bridge on the Deopani-Jorhat road was also partially damaged as a result of incendiarism Removal of the rails from the railway track between Naojan and Borpathar caused the derailment of the train 327 Up on 10th October Some persons were injured The Inspection Bungalow at Gaurisagar was burnt on 15th and two railway structures were set on fire in the Sibsagar sub-division in the night of October 14/15 A boat carrying paddy for military purposes was sunk by some 20/25 Congressmen at Jorhat They even fired some shots to overawe the boatmen to bring the boat ashore On 19th October telegraph wires were cut near Sibsagar town Cutting of telegraph wires including a military cable was reported from four other places in the Sibsagar sub-division

One Extra Departmental post office at Baruagaon under Golaghat P S the Pattyagaon Railway Station under Jorhat P S and the Jhanji Inspection Bangalow were burnt down in the night of 11/12th, 14th and 29/30th October respectively

In the months of November and December a large number of schools—mostly primary the bungalow of a tea garden manager post offices etc were set on fire and destroyed throughout the district A military cable under Titabar P S was cut on 1st of November At *Disangmukh some buildings of the River Steam* Navigation Co were set on fire and destroyed At Dergaon Mr Justice Baund and Dr Bor were fired at while they were on their way from Jorhat to Golaghat in a military station wagon But the shots missed the target

An attempt was made to hoist the Congress flag at the Sonari police station Some 80 youths of Mahmara Congress Committee went in a procession led by Surendra Nath Misra to the police station for that purpose They were mercilessly beaten by the police and dispersed

In a bid to liquidate British Raj and to replace the same with people's raj, Panchayats were organised in the rural areas of the district Attempt was made to render every village into a *'state' in which one Rastrapati was to rule with the help of the* ministers In one such 'state'—Kandugurı—Lakheswar Baruah had assumed the title of 'Rastrapati' and made an attempt for covering the whole Charigaon Mauza Under him functioned a ministry of six members This type of parallel government functioned in Teok and Hatigarh too

On 27th January, 1943, the removal of rails caused a serious derailment between Lakwa and Safri, resulting in the death of eight persons on the spot Twentyeight more were injured of whom three later succumbed to their injuries

The Quit India movement, marked with the massive participation of the people, began gradually to fizzle out towards the middle of 1943 in the province of Assam

The underground resistance movement, initiated by the Congress Socialists, had made some headway under the leadership of persons mentioned in the foregoing pages However they could not long keep hold on the situation and continue the movement to its goal because of the lack of a concerted plan of action to be followed by the activists throughout the province Isolated sabotage activities and some cases of mere incendiarism were not enough for winning the independence of a vast country without

a strong revolutionary political ideology The leadership of the movement could not fully utilise the revolutionary zeal of the masses against the alien rulers The idea of a compromise with the British imperialists had always lured the Congress leader ship before during and after the Quit India struggle What the people—left leaderless and mostly unguided—did in the name of an independence struggle was a series of impulsive and heroic deeds in contravention to the Gandhian principle of non violence

The anti British sentiment did not die out even after the failure of the great upsurge of 42 With the defeat of the British forces in the South East particularly the fall of Singapore and Burma to the Japanese—the popular sentiment in Assam ran high in favour of the Japanese Subhas Bose s exploits in Burma Assam Arakan and in Imphal contributed much in heighten ing the anti British feelings of the people Even rank and file Congressmen made public speeches welcoming the Japanese aggressor Independence could not be obtained by merely forming national guards said Dev Kanta Boruah in a meeting in Nowgong on 3rd June 1943 supplying foodstuffs and resisting the Japs it could be obtained if the Japanese Army were in vited to Assam Immediately after their entry it would be pos sible to capture all offices Lakshmi Prasad Goswami too fell in line with the thinking of Dev Kanta Boruah Their action was in tune with the line of R C P I , the latter was in favour of creat ing the necessary atmosphere to welcome the invading army Purna Chandra Sarmah also expressed his opinion in favour of a Japanese take over He even fancied the idea of administer ing the Nowgong district in the event of a Japanese take over with Haladhar Bhuyan as Deputy Commissioner and himself as the 'defender and peace-keeper i e S P ! Anyway independ ence struggle or movement is not synonymous to the change of masters To welcome the Japanese in preference to the British was meant to do no good to the country either While demo cratic forces all over the world were fighting against the fascist block—Japan included—the welcome gesture to the latter by the leaders of the freedom movement showed the utter lack of poli tical sagacity on their part

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THE REANG UNREST (1942 43)

JIBAN MUKHOPADHYAYA

It was during the years 1942 43 that the whole world was blaz ing with fire caused by the Second World War As a part of the British dominion India was automatically drawn within the vortex of the War Rangoon fell on the 7th March 1942 and Japan was then advancing towards India with a lightning speed Gandhiji gave his clarion call to the nation to wage a direct war against the British Rulers and put an end to the Sa tanic Government Within hours after passing the Quit India Resolution late on the night of August 8 the entire Working Committee of the Indian National Congress was arrested Public reaction was immediate and spontaneous Government resorted to a policy of violence police repression firing lathicharges and arrest of peaceful agitators followed It added fuel to the fire and inflamed the feelings of the people So very soon the nature of the movement changed and it actually swelled into a revolt With the slogan Do or Die people began to court ar rest face police atrocities and even death

Just at this time in Tripura a native Indian state in the hilly tracts of North Eastern India covered with dense forest the Reangs * a tribal people under the leadership of one Ratanmani

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* In Tripura Reangs are next to Tripuri Tribals in importance In 1951—their number was 40 000 approximately They are said to be of Kuki origin (Trip Gazetteer Vol VIII) Having come from Shan States of Burma—they must have in course of their migration through Chittagong Hill to Tripura had intimate contact with differ ent sub groups of Mongoloid origin and thus got ethnically mixed up Linguistically they lost much of their originality and distinc tiveness The language they speak is related to Tripuris—the ruling Trib (*Reangs* by B Mukherjee) Although they ret n many of their earlier characteristics in matters of social organisation religion and custom they adopted Hinduism to a great extent but unlike the Tripuris who because of their privileged position had greater opport-

broke out in open rebellion against the age long feudal tyranny and oppression With 20 thousand Rebel Reangs Ratanmani founded an independent state with all the paraphernalia of a modern state system viz a ministry a commander in chief granary a well ordered police and espionage system and so on Tuicharbuha a place within the jurisdiction of Udaipur Police Station was his capital It posed a serious challenge not only to the traditional Reang social hierarchy of feudal nature but also to the feeble Tripura Raj For two years the rebels maintained their independent existence and continued their activities of looting plundering and destroying the properties of their enemies They even arrested their enemies for trial by Ratanmani During the Second World War when the Tripura Raj was seriously engaged in strengthening the British War efforts and Tripura was made the principal military outpost at the Indo Burmese Frontier, the Government took a serious view of those incidents and ultimately with ruthless oppression and savagery crushed the rebellion Ratanmani was tortured to death in prison

The causes behind the Reang rebellion were manifold As in all other native Indian states the administration of Tripura which had an area of four thousand and twentynine square miles with a population numbering five lakhs and thirteen thousand (according to the 1941 census) was based on mediaeval feudal system The king was all in all in the state and he according to his choice appointed his ministers who did not care to look after the well being of his people Retired I C S officers who were appointed with high salaries to conduct the administration were neither aware of the problems of the people nor eager to know them The arbitrariness of the Maharaja and innumerable acts of corruption on the part of the bureaucracy had crippled the administration totally The major portion of the state revenue was spent to meet the expenses of the pleasure and luxury of the

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unities to become cultured they were not so cultured and were held in low estimation They were engaged as Palki bearers of Tripura rajahs (Imp Gaz VII and VIII) and were also compelled by circumstances to make their abode in remote interior of the State In fact they had to suffer indignities in many way Like the Kukis they were subjected to various sorts of discrimination—as they were made to pay family taxes in excess of Tripuris There had been many occasions when Reangs rose to open rebellion as in 1943

Royal Family while there were neither proper educational nor medical facilities for the people Tripura was rich with its mineral and forest resources, but no attempt was made till then to improve the state economy by the proper use of those resources

Like all other tribal people the Reang used to live in the hilly regions and by Jhum Cultivation' they produced paddy and cotton Their economic condition was far from satisfactory Famine starvation, pestilence and epidemics were recurring features of the land Moreover, they had to pay various obnoxious taxes like the House Tax, Bamboo Tax, Cane Tax and various festival taxes The rate of taxation was not equal everywhere While the Tripuris paid minimum taxes, the Reang and the (Noatias), another tribal people, had to pay the maximum It is learnt from the statement of Sri Umakanta Das in 1903 that the Reangs were already over-taxed Time and again dissatisfied Reangs protested against this autocratic system of taxation but it brought no benefit to them It was alleged that the Reangs did not submit 'Tanki' or the statement of their agricultural produce to their respective 'Tahsil Kachari and they were involved in illegal deals in exporting cotton, mustard seed, sesamum etc to the British Indian territories without paying any export duty to the Tripura Raj Hence the government imposed a higher rate of House Tax at Rs 9/- on them in Amarpur Division

As the Reangs were totally dependent on the 'Jhum Cultivation' for their livelihood, there sprang up numerous tiny villages in the hilly tracts of Tripura each dominated by a village headman known as *Choudhuri* The *Choudhuries* in their turn elected *Rai* who was the supreme head of the Reang community This election was to be confirmed by the king of Tripura while any one having wealth could be a village headman and buy the title *Choudhuri* from the Maharaja The *Rai*'s decision on all matters was final He was the link between the Maharaja and the ordinary Reangs The *Choudhuries* acted according to *Rai*'s advice mainly to honour royal decision Very often the economic solidarity of the *Choudhuries*, backed by the royal policy, made them petty tyrants The king collected his taxes through the *Choudhuries* who were therefore exempted from paying any tax By dint of their specially privileged position they made various illegal exactions from the ordinary people They forced the ordinary Reangs to work in their fields without payment

They even did not care to observe the traditional customs that existed in the Reang Community but punished others for its violation Divorce was in vogue among the Reangs but none could possess two wives at a time Many of the *Choudhuries* went unpunished even after violating this sacred tradition

Again and again the Reangs tried to bring the inequities suffered by them at the hands of the *Choudhuries* to the notice of the Maharaja but all their attempts ended in failure So they lodged a written complaint to the Lushai Chief Rengbungha and appealed to him to redress their grievances It had undoubtedly infuriated the Tripura King against the Reangs

The political awakening of Tripura was largely due to the political movements of the neighbouring districts like Comilla Chittagong and Sylhet As Tripura was a native Indian state its people had nothing to do with the Indian freedom struggle at its initial stage though there were many sympathisers with the Indian freedom movement among them Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya was in favour of the great Swadeshi Movement of 1905 The *Bengalee* a noted journal reports (Sept 3 1905) of a Swadeshi meeting held at Maulavi Bazar in 1905 which was presided over by Babu Barada Kanta Sen Sub Manager of Tripura Raj Here Resolutions sympathising with the Swadeshi Movement and boycotting foreign goods as far as practicable were unanimously passed Tripura was a safer shelter for the Bengali revolutionaries as generally the British police had no authority to enter Tripura The Anusilan Samity and the Yugantar group had established various secret branches in the state In later years with the growth of political consciousness the people of this native principality began to demand responsible government supplanting the royal autocracy So the political movement in Tripura had twin aspects—while it gave full support to the campaigns launched against the oppressive princely administration and demanding responsible government

The Foundation of the Tripura Rajya Gana Parisad during the 30's of the present century had placed the mass awake in Tripura on a new plane According to Mr Chidananda Goswami in response to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's All India State Peoples Movement which aimed at breaking the powers of the native Indian states whose rulers were regarded as pillars of British Imperialism Tripura Rajya Gana Parishad was formed

in 1936 with Abdul Wazed as its President, inspired by the aims and ideals of the Indian National Congress This organisation took up the cause of the tea garden labourers, the tribals and the peasantry It was for the first time that under their leadership the labourers working in various industries took to the path of struggle to realise their demands They opposed all sorts of feudal privileges, put forward the demands for land reforms abolition of 'Ghar Chukti' (House Tax) 'Ghasuri' (tax on cutting of grass) and 'Tut-Tung' system (by which the government officials travelling the hilly-regions for official work could force the tribal people to carry their belongings) which prevailed among the tribals These movements and the activities of the 'Tripura Jana Mangal Samity' and of the communists produced a great impact on the illiterate simple hearted and backward tribals It gave them a new outlook and a sense of self-respect, and they understood the importance of organisation

The Second World War broke out in 1939 It resulted in the sudden rise of prices of all essential commodities Food stuffs became scarce All available paddy was purchased by the government and there were hoarding tendencies among some of the *Choudhuries* who wanted to make profit out of this situation An acute famine was prevailing over an extensive area of Amarpur Udaipur, Belonia and the neighbouring hilly regions causing much suffering and misery to the people particularly to the tribals

A loyal supporter of British imperialism and a distinguished member of the Chamber of Princes subsequently elected President of the Council of Rulers for Eastern States Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya (1923 1947 A D) pledged his whole hearted support and fullest co operation to make the British War efforts success He formed War-Committee in all Divisions of his territory and a Central War-Committee at Agartala A War Fund was also raised to meet the War expenses In order to raise the band of soldiers the Maharaja asked the Reang Youths through the *Rai* the Reang Chief, to join the State Armed Force A majority of the Reangs dissatisfied with the *Choudhuries* for their self-seeking nature and ruthless exploitation, unanimously expressed their inability to conform to the Royal order and instead they suggested that the *Choudhuries*

who were always aided by royal power in all their evil designs should fill the Armed Force Debi Sing Reang, the *Rai*, did not argue with them and informed the Raja of the decision of his subjects This irritated the Maharaja It offered a unique opportunity to Khagendra Reang, a *Choudhuri* of Bagafa, notorious for his cruelty and unscrupulousness, to fulfil his long cherished dream to become the *Rai* of the Reangs He assured the king of an adequate number of Reang youths for the State Armed Force, and in return the king appointed him as *Rai* deposing Debi Singh Reang elected before This infuriated the Reangs and they refused to accept the new *Rai* as the appointment of one *Rai* during the life time of another was a gross violation of the Reang tradition and custom

Armed with royal forces the newly nominated *Rai* Khagendra Reang, on his return to the native hill resorted to a policy of force to recruit the soldiers from among the Reangs It created a great consternation in the hilly regions Khagendra was already a hated man among the Reangs, now his evil designs and cruel repression practically forced the entire community to the path of rebellion

The unarmed and unorganised Reangs found a true leader in Ratanmani Reang a lean and thin man of moderate height and ordinary complexion, originally hailing from Ramchira village in Ramgarh sub-division of Hill Chittagong He had settled down in Tripura somewhere near Bagafa in the Belonia Sub division in or around the year 1937 A D He belonged to the Noatia tribe His father's name was Nilkamal Noatia who was well-known for his saintly character This family enjoyed great power and prestige in their native village Chandra Kumar Tripura, a brother of Ratanmani, was the headman of his village What led him to give up the homely comforts and embrace the life of a Sannyasin is not known It is said that before he settled at Tripura, he had passed the life of a pilgrim for more than twelve years and wandered at various holy shrines He had more than one string of beads around his neck while his disciples had only one He initiated them in the name of Lord Hari, the incarnation of love by uttering 'Om Prana Rama', and taught them from the *Puranas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* While teaching his disciples he very often referred to the life of Lord Chaitanya the love incar-

nate Khusi Krishna Noatia of Tripura was his first disciple With Khusi Krishna, Gelakrishna Chaityasen and Deba Roy Reang he founded his first Ashram at Taofoam in the Amarpur at Dambur and at Dakshin Maharani in the Udaipur sub-division By forming a *Kirtan* party (in praise of Lord Hari) he used to frequent the Reang villages and preached among them messages of hopes love, courage and self-reliance Within a short time Ratanmani became a symbol of new hope and aspirations among the impoverished and exploited Reangs and a large following grew around him They began to think that Ratanmani their leader was no other than an incarnation of God and there was nothing to fear from the oppressive *Choudhuries* He had his disciples even among the government officials and royal soldiers During the Pous Sankranti Mela at the very source of the river Gomati known as Tirtha Mukh' in the Amarpur Sub-Division his disciples came into conflict with the Brahmins and the *Choudhuries* who tried to increase the amount of 'Dakshina' However blood shed was averted at the sagacity of Ratanmani This protest of the Reangs naturally made the *Choudhuries* indignant

During the Second World War the view got currency among the Reangs that it was no longer necessary for the disciples of Ratanmani to join the armed forces It had the effect of multiplying the number of his disciples within a very short time To protect his famine stricken disciples from hunger and death Ratanmani established some Dharmagolas' at various Reang villages His disciples stood united against the attempts of Khagendra Chowdhury to recruit soldiers Being rebuffed by the Reangs Khagendra lodged a complaint against Ratanmani and informed the Maharaja that he was the only obstacle to recruitment A royal order was issued for the arrest of Ratanmani and the arrested person was detained in the Along' (special prison where prisoners were remanded at the Royal order) at Agartala However Ratanmani managed to escape from captivity with the help of one Bhuamar Dev Barma a disciple of his and a government employee This undoubtedly enhanced his prestige among his disciples

Now on his return among his disciples he began to organise them in order to put up strong and effective resistance to the royal force With this aim in view he founded several camps for

his disciples at Tuicharbuha, Hajacherra, Pancherra, Tumani and Bagata, and created a ministry, a well organised army, police force and espionage system under the able generals and police officials Treasury, Courts, Public Works Department, Army Barracks were established and Collectors Magistrates, Engineers Contractors and Overseers were appointed Thus Ratanmani founded an independent state with all the paraphernalia of a modern state system For the free movement of the rebel Reangs and their soldiers they constructed wide and long roads in the hilly tracts by clearing off jungles Needless to say that the roads were not constructed over night but both the police and the forest department were totally unaware of these Their organisation was undoubtedly very strong It is learnt from the accounts of Mr Dinesh Chandra Das, Second Officer of the Udaipur police station that Ratanmani lived in a well protected place at Tuicharbuha Camp, his capital and it was necessary to cross seven well-protected gates to see him Their intelligence system was very efficient and according to his remarks They have powers to resist at least two thousand men at any time'

With a large number of dedicated followers behind him Ratanmani lost no time in organising his massive campaigns of looting plundering and destroying all the movable properties including hens goats, cows buffaloes paddy—of the oppressive *Choudhuries* and their men who were their only target of attack Cases of arson were frequent Reports in this regard began to pour in from all the Reang areas of Amarpur, Udaipur and Belonia It was also alleged that they were preparing for a revolt against the Maharaja and immediately after finishing their preparation they would attack Belonia Amarpur and Udaipur towns It created a panic in these towns The rebels also began to preach that there is no longer any king at Tripura and from now everything in this state will be done at Ratanmani's instruction 'We the poor will conduct the administration of this state and Netaji Subhas Chandra will come very soon with his followers to help us' Very often they used to smoke cigarettes making those with ten or five rupee currency notes and told the people that "with Netaji's appearance these notes will be void and new notes will be issued' These campaigns created great panic among the followers of the oppressive *Chowdhuries* and further swelled the number of Ratanmani's followers

On receiving numerous complaints of misdeeds on the part of Ratanmani's disciples Mr Dinesh Chandra Das Second Officer of the Udaipur police station was deputed to make an enquiry Accompanied by some men he started from Udaipur on the 27th July 1943 and reached Brahmacherra by the evening He passed the night there Next day on 28th July when they started for the Tuinani camp of Ratanmani's disciples they heard the sounds of trumpets made of buffalo's horns from all sides No doubt these were signals for Ratanmani's men Before sun set they reached their destination and put up at a nearby house Two Constables were sent to the camp to inform its leader about the complaints against them and to ask him to see Mr Das next morning to help him in his investigation On their return they informed Mr Das that the camp was well protected and it was manned by two thousand to three thousand armed men Since the dawn of 29th Mr Das and his two Constables were practically in a state of arrest As Ratanmani was then staying at Tuicharbuha Camp twelve miles away from Tuinani camp Mr Das escorted by several armed rebels was compelled to go there On his way to Tuicharbuha Mr Das passed through well constructed wide roads suitable for wheeled traffic There were innumerable creeks on his way having no bridges over them but they were well guarded by the rebels In the evening with the help of the ministry Mr Das managed to see Ratanmani who lived in a secure and well guarded part of the camp When Mr Das stated before Ratanmani the object of his coming the rebel leader began to talk He showed no anger and talked for more than an hour with dignity and grace He said that his sole object was to preach religion among the simple hearted Reangs Next he talked about the exploitation illegal exactions and arrogant behaviour of Khagendra Rai and his men He said God is the friend of the poor To protect the poor is Religion God does not tolerate injustice and then he cited many instances from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* to prove his points Ratanmani appealed to Mr Das not to harass his disciples After this interview Ratanmani asked his men to arrange for Mr Das's departure next morning Later Mr Das remarked I was charmed by his sweet behaviour He told me nothing against the Maharaja or the State Government It seemed to me that he was truly a saint Mr Das returned to Udaipur on 31st July 1943

After Mr Das's so called arrest Khagendra Rai informed the Tripura Raj that he had been arrested to be sacrificed at the alter of goddess Tripura Sundari During a critical period of the Second World War Tripura Raj could not ignore the menacing attitude of the rebel Reangs On the 30th July 1943 he issued order to arrest (a) gang of dacoits in the Udaipur and Amarpur Sub-Divisions (b) shoot them if necessary (c) confiscate their weapons and (d) to burn their houses and arrest their parents and women On the same date Lieutenant Nagendra Dev Barma left for Udaipur with a large contingent and reached there by mid night On 31st July Lieutenant Harendra Kishore Dev Barma was sent to Belonia for the same purpose with an equally strong force The activities of the rebels had created such a tense atmosphere that not only the people of the Udaipur City but also the Commander-in Chief became awestruck As the *Choudhuries* were the target of attack by the rebels Lt Nagendra Dev Barma informed the Agartala authorities I am sending Krishna Prasad (Choudhury) Bijoy Prasad (Choudhury) and their families from Radha Kishorepur town to Agartala so that their presence may not endanger the town The panicky mood of the soldiers may further be proved by the fact that in spite of the Royal order to crush the rebellion within two days they could not proceed beyond Udaipur town area and start operations against Ratanmani before 2nd August though they had reached Udaipur on the 30th July

On 2nd August Lt Nagendra Dev Barma attacked the Tumani Camp Though the rebels were ready to offer fight serious clash was averted due to the caution of the royal forces Lt Dev Barma reached Tuicharbuhi on 4th August and found the rebel camp deserted Fire was set in there at his order Then he proceeded up to Dambur through Natun Bazar On his way he burnt all the houses of the rebels Following the military forces under Lt Dev Barma Monoranjan Thakur the Chief of the State Armed Forces, went up to Natun Bazar and on his way he arrested nearly 600 or 700 men They were sent to Agartala

Lt Harendra Kishore Dev Barma and his party reached Belonia in the early morning of 1st August At about 4 P M he met the rebels at Lakshmicherra There was an open clash between the rebels and the Royal forces Dagger swords spears and a few muzzle loaders were no match for the modern arms of the Royal

forces After a short resistance the rebels took to fight and in this clash eight rebels were shot dead and five more were arrested

The Maharaja ordered his generals to crush the Reang unrest within two days and thus the brute force was let loose upon the Reang villages They followed a policy of ruthless destruction of the villages and practically within two days the entire area was reduced to wilderness The arrested persons were brutally tortured and sent to Agartala Mr Tripur Chandra Sen remarks in his book *Tripura in Transition* (p 18) *Their (Reang) leaders claim that* 20 425 people were altogether arrested but the officer in charge of the office of the then government of Tripura asserts that the number was below 3000 including 200 women and 12 children on the ground that they did not revolt against the King but against the oppression of the *Choudhuries* They were forced to give up Saivism and embrace Vaishnavism

On that night when the Rebel leaders informed Ratanmani who was then staying at Tuicharbuha of all the happenings of the day the leader thought it wise not to go into open clash with the Royal forces and advised his followers to hide He himself went to his native village Ramchira on that night with some of his ministers and generals This was why Lt Nagendra Dev Barma found the Tuicharbuha Camp deserted on the 4th August Just after a week of this incident the Royal forces attacked the Ramchira village and in this encounter some of Ratanmani's trusted followers were arrested Ratanmani anyhow managed to escape but six months later he was arrested by the British police from the Dighnala village and thrown into the Ramgamati jail By December 1943 he was handed over to the Agartala authorities and kept at the Maharaja's house (Along) where he was brutally tortured to death Some of his followers were tried by a special court and convicted in July 1944 Thus the Reang unrest died with its leader

Divergent opinions have been expressed and much has been written on the Reang unrest It was once customary to regard the Rebel Reangs as dacoits and the Tripura Government particularly held this view According to others the Reangs rose in revolt against the oppression of their feudal lords—the *Rai* and the *Choudhuries* Some even went to the extent of regarding this movement as a part of India's freedom struggle and named the party of Ratanmani as Swadeshi Group

Though the Rebels followed a policy of massive looting and plundering in the hilly region they could not be called mere dacoits as they directed their campaigns only against the self seeking and oppressive *Rai* and the *Choudhuries* While the people of the native Indian states during that period started a movement to have a responsible government the Reangs told nothing against the Tripura Raj and in conformity with the Reang tradition and practices wanted to have an elected *Rai* and *Choudhuries* having sympathy for the poor Reangs They had a massive plan and sound philosophy behind their movement and dacoits they certainly were not as ignoring the authority of the oppressive *Rai* and the *Choudhuries* they founded a sort of independent state where the Tripura Raj was held in great esteem as is proved by the presence of the picture of Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya in the meeting room of Ratanmani's ministry in the Tuicharbuha Camp Ratanmani had his supporters among the government officials State armed forces and even among the *Choudhuries* Ratanmani was not a leader of the dacoits as it is not possible to form a gang of bandits with more than 20 thousand men he was the leader of a race and organiser of a revolt

Time and again the officer in charge of different Police Stations, people of Udaipur Amarpur and Belonia area and even Lt Harendra Kishore Dev Barma described the rebels as Swadeshies or freedom fighters In a letter to the Agartala authorities Lt H K Dev Barma informed that the masses and the *Choudhuries* had great sympathy for the Swadeshi Party and in his move to arrest the rebels he found no help from them Moreover while Ratanmani left for his village Ramchura he advised his followers to go to Sachindralal Sinha a noted revolutionary and a Congress leader and follow his advice It proves Ratanmani's connection with them and the freedom movement Moreover his disciples were found to propagate that there is no longer any King in Tripura and from now everything in this state will be done at Ratanmani's instruction We the poor will conduct the administration of this state and Netaji Subhas Chandra will come very soon with his followers to help us What is meant by these utterances? It is not an easy job to smoke cigarettes making those with ten or five rupee currency notes and tell with Netaji's appearance these notes will be void and new notes will be issued So their faith in Netaji and freedom of the country cannot be ruled out

In conclusion it may well and truly be said that the Reang unrest was anti feudal in origin and nature and it had deep-rooted connections with the freedom movement of India In spite of well ordered organisation and best intentions it failed, as only a sincere and dedicated band of followers are no match for determined military troops with all the modern armaments It failed but awakened the slumbering Reangs and inspired them with new hopes and views of life It failed but it totally crushed the power of the oppressive *Rai* and the *Choudhuries* and created a legacy of its own

NOTES

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2. Harendra Kishore Dev Barma *Tripurar Reang Bidroha Ba Ratanmaur Andolan* Vide *Daunk Basumati* (Bengali daily from Calcutta dated 11 11 73 and 18 11 73)

3 Nalin Ranjan Roychoudhury *Tripura through the Ages* 1977 Agartala

4 Suprakash Roy *Mukti Juddhe Bharatiya Krishak* Calcutta 1980

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6 *Tripura District Gazetteer* Edi K D Menon Agartala 1975

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FLOWERS OF HUMANITY THAT CAN NEVER PERISH

P C JOSHI

KAYYUR HEROES ON EVE OF EXECUTION

Four young kisan patriots already became famous as the Kayyur comrades have been hanged on 29th March 1943 Their names are Madathil Appur Kunhambu Nair Chirukandan Abu Baker All of them were below 25 years barely literate, but they became people s leaders in their village They took the foremost part in the organisation of the Congress Committee, themselves joined the Congress volunteers and founded the Kisan Sabha The peasants in that taluk had no tenancy rights, they organised and led a veritable kisan upsurge The police hated them for their patriotism the landlords because they roused and activised the kisans

A unit of the Malabar Special Police was stationed in the area They went out to search kisan houses and ended by looting them They caught kisan workers to interrogate them but began and ended by beating them up To protest against this highhandedness a demonstration was fixed in Kayyur village A police constable came along His very sight so enraged the people—he is reported to have misbehaved with a Muslim woman—that the assembled kisans are alleged to have stoned him to death It is for this that those comrades have been hanged

The sessions judge admitted that in an incident like that in which so many participated it is difficult to identify the person who actually struck the fatal blow and that probably that person had not been brought before the court Still he convicted them

The High Court summarily rejected the appeal It stunned all patriots of Malabar Leaders of all parties and all the MLAs and MLCs appealed to the Madras governor for mercy A provincewise united front campaign was set afoot but the governor

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refused to listen It was another shock but soon enough the campaign took a wider turn From all over the country appeals were made to the government of India to intervene

They wrote me a moving letter They had vowed to fight to death for the freedom of the country when they joined the party they are not afraid to die they only regret that they were dying at the gallows and not on the battle front when the Motherland stood in danger of attack from the fascist invaders

I made a special appeal to the Government offered to send them to the army or the Jap rear the day they were released which army could have desired better soldiers

But the government of India is not ours a prisoner of its own phrase— the respect for law and order must be maintained —it went by red tape and rejected the appeal afraid of creating precedents

After this it seemed a hopeless battle but we did not give up as along as there was any hope of saving them for the service of the motherland Appeal was filed before the privy council our British comrades secured the free services of the eminent counsel D N Pritt This too was of no avail

The British comrades tried the very last chance they moved some labour and liberal MPs and even some church dignitaries to appeal to the King That too failed

Four of the best sons of the Indian Kisans are no more No Indian patriot who heard their tale refused to do whatever lay in his power to save them Across the seven seas sons of the British workers leaders of the British Communist Party struggled to save them as if they were their own countrymen

Sons of the soil they adopted communism the cause of mankind, as their own Young in age they joined the unconquerable army of fighters for freedom the Communist Party whose fighting detachments operate in every country in the world They lived as true patriots they died as noble martyrs

* * *

We are the most influential party in Malabar There the Red Flag is not confined to towns alone but flies proudly over hundreds of villages An overwhelming majority of our 3 000 members are sons of peasants and out of them 16 are serving life sentences four were awaiting the gallows

When the party centre asked me to go to Malabar as its representative for our provincial conference it came as the fulfilment of a long cherished desire, to see with my own eyes communism in action in our countryside

When the party centre also commissioned me to meet and give our last greetings to the Kayyur comrades, also go to Kayyur and pay the party s homage to the families of these four party brothers, I knew I was going on an errand of honour.

As soon as the party conference concluded at Calicut we rushed to Cannanore covered a rally of 6 000 workers and citizens in the midday sun and amidst shouts of Kayyur Sahakal Zindabad, motored straight to the central jail For a long distance the echo of the slogan followed us Krishna Pillai our Malabar Secretary had announced that we were going to the jail

We pulled up before the jail gate It looked like any other jail and the iron wicket door was opened for us just the same way as everywhere else We bent ourselves low and passed through signed up the register and were taken charge by the jailor

We went round and round the gravel path till another small gate opened into the condemned cells

There they were in the first four condemned cells all standing at ease pulling themselves to attention and their clenched fists went up as they said Lal Salaam! After passing in front of all the four cells, I came back to the centre and looked up

They looked so young and clean their bodies had grown thin. after a whole year in the condemned cells but light and courage shown on their faces Their very first glance convinced me that these lads will mount the gallows with firm steps and Communist Party Zindabad" on their lips

We had carried a big packet of postcards and letters written in all the languages of our vast land They were greetings to them written in an informal and intimate manner by workers peasants students of all ages and of both sexes from all over They smiled broadly when they saw them the jailor was bothered how he would get them translated to censor them and felt relieved when I told him that the English translation of most of them were attached therewith

They understood neither English nor Hindustani and I could not talk Malayalam With the jailor s permission Pillai trans-

lated me sentence by sentence The flood of tears over my cheeks made the flow of words out of the mouth possible or I would have just got choked up and collapsed This is the substance to what I told them on behalf of the party

The party is prouder of you four than it is of any of its members You came to us when we were in mere hundreds Today we are over 9 000 party members and 8 000 candidates All 17 000 of us vow to you that we will hold high the banner you held so worthily and continue fighting the battle you fought so heroically

You are dying for an immortal cause of freedom and prosperity for our country and the whole world Ours is the cause of justice it must triumph you are giving your lives to see that it shall triumph We know you are fulfilling your dreams not dying

You our beloved fours are being lost to the party But it is the work and example of comrades like you that have made the party what it is today When you joined the party in Malabar it was a group of young patriots today we are the major political party in your province All over the country the best sons of the people are joining the party Wherever the party is known your names are uttered with love and veneration Patriotic young men and women consider it an honour to join the party because it bred young martyrs like you

The party is not losing you but gaining four martyrs Let them send you four to the gallows that we can't help today But inspired by you four we will win four hundred four thousand new party members This they can't prevent this we will work for And rest assured comrades we will win As our cause is immortal so is its instrument our party Persecution never weakened but only strengthened us Your martyrdom not only bring glory but strength to the party No communist can desire a better end

You are being lost to your families we know When you joined the party You accepted the people as your parents and worked to see that *no Indian father or mother suffers from what your own did* Rest assured comrades that we all the 17 000 of us will look after your families as our own We will do all we can to make your parents feel that the party is their family every party member their son

To get the chance to meet you has been the greatest day of my life and I bring greetings from the party you love more than your life I am going to your village from here and will meet your families Is there any message for them?

Buck them up Ask them not to worry all of them said together

Anything else?—I asked

You have already said all that was welling up inside us one of them said

Jailor Saheb began looking at his wrist watch I asked them to hurry up

Kunhambu who was in the first cell began The party made me capable of doing whatever I did for the people If the party thinks I have done a duty that is all I ever deserved

Appu said

You have brought great news of the growing strength of the party We will now mount the gallows with added strength We joined the party to fight and die for the freedom of the country

Chirukandan said

We are only four Kisan sons But India has millions of kisans We can be hanged but they can't be destroyed This is what has sustained us all through Those letters from all over the country make us feel sorry that we can't live longer to serve them We have known no other regret If we had more lives we would have died over and over again for our cause He had taken a leading part in two kisan struggles

Abu Baker was in the last cell He said

We have drawn inspiration from the lives of our martyrs We never dreamt that we will share the honour of being one of them Tell all the comrades that we will mount the gallows fearlessly My mother is very old Cheer her up My brothers are very young Educate them for party work I was the eldest member of the family They have nobody to look after them

The moment he stopped the jailor said that the time was up I asked him permission to shake hands with them He agreed

Not only the iron grating of the cell but the verandah had separated us from them Jail rules!

It was a thrill to go near them and clasp their hands warmly They had been volunteers and immediately after the hand shake

they instinctively drew up to attention and gave the Lal Salaam with their clenched fists

Appu held my hands a few moment longer and quietly whispered Comrade but no other word came out of him I looked into his eyes—they were moist I looked away across the verandah—there was a sort of flower bed Without a thought what was inside me got formed into a sentence

These flowers are perishable You Comrades are the flowers of humanity that will never perish

Pillai promptly translated me Young Appu blushed deep

When it came to Abu Baker I did not feel like letting his hand go I thought of the great Moplahs and their heroic past They had contributed one out of the four martyrs And there are Hindu patriots who doubt the bona fides of our Muslim brothers! As I tarried he went on repeating Lal Salaam Comrade! He had a very finely chiselled face and patriotic fervour glowed in his eyes

As I finished clenched fists went up again from both sides and we marched out with much lighter steps than we had marched in We all felt easy within ourselves thinking with pride for having comrades like them

When we were left to ourselves Sundarayya who had been silent all through sunk in thought spoke up You were supposed to buck up and they have bucked you up instead

The only answer I could give was They are our martyrs they need no bucking up I am their comrade being left behind I needed it and got it

The car sped its way to the railway station where we had to catch the train to Charvattur and then go up the river on boat to Kavyur where the families of these comrades were expecting us the same evening

I finished my Malabar tour on 26th and at Calicut our Madras Secretary Mohan's telegram awaited me Whitehall refuses to intervene date of execution will be fixed shortly As I am writing this a comrade from Malabar has come with the news that these four comrades were hanged on 29th morning The previous night they learnt that they will have to walk to the gallows the next morning They spent the night singing in chorus patriotic

songs and shouting slogans Communist Party Zindabad" being the most frequent and loudest Not one prisoner, political or nonpolitical, slept that night in the Cannanore central prison

Early in the morning 3 000 citizens gathered at the jail gate demanding their bodies The request was refused and they were asked to disperse

Malabar kisans produced immortal sons like these young martyrs Our party nurses patriots who take martyrdom easy, with a smiling face We dip our Red Banner to our Kayyur martyrs

Part V

Students, Army, Navy and the INA in the Freedom Struggle

BENGAL S STUDENT MOVEMENT

GAUTAM CHATTOPADHYAYA

EMBRYO (1818 99)

In 1835 a sixteen year old young pupil of the Hindoo College Calcutta Kylash Chunder Dutt wrote in a prize winning essay (*A Journal of 48 Hours or the Year 19 5*) about an imaginary revolt of the Bengalee youth against British rule in India In stirring words Dutt declared The people of India and particularly those of the metropolis had been subject for the last 50 years to every species of subaltern oppression The dagger and the bowl were dealt out with a merciless hand and neither age nor sex nor condition could repress the rage of the British barbarians These events together with the recollection of the grievances suffered by their ancestors roused the dormant spirit of the generally considered timid Indian Finding that every day the offences instead of being extenuated were aggravated that no redress could be obtained by appeals either to the Lords or Commons he framed the bold but desperate resolution of hurling Lord Fell Butcher the Viceroy of India from his seat and establishing a government composed of the most patriotic men in the kingdom With the rapidity of lightning the spirit of Rebellion spread through this once pacific people

The rebellion was ultimately crushed but the leader of the rebellion, a Bengalee youth faced death with exemplary courage Just before his execution the rebel leader cried out I have shed my last blood in defence of my country and though the feble spark within me is about to leave the frail frame I hope you will continue to persevere in the course you have so gloriously commenced

In 1835 this was a mere dream of a young rebellious student but exactly in 1945 an unarmed uprising of the entire people of Calcutta against British rule was indeed sparked off by the famous students action on November 21 1945 We shall talk about it in a little while

In 1838, the radical students of the Hindoo College came forward to set up a quasi political body—the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge In 1841 a full fledged political organisation was set up in Calcutta—the *Deshahitaishinee Sabha* Two hundred students attended the meeting and a school teacher one time pupil of Derozio Sarada Prasad Ghosh made the keynote speech[3] Sarada Prasad said Ever since the commencement of the British supremacy the policy of our present rulers has been to deprive us of the enjoyment of political liberty our deprivation of the enjoyment of political liberty is the cause of our misery and degradation

In fairness we cannot say that a student movement developed in Bengal in this period i e in the first half of the nineteenth century but a new spirit gripped the minds of the forward looking student—youth of Bengal In the words of a contemporary The day is now gone by when an Indian could be struck even by an Englishman with impunity We have ourselves more than once seen the blow instantly returned Societies and associations have been formed in which indignant members have spoken menace and defiance while alluding to the British name and portrayed in lurid colours the treachery perfidy and aggression the oppression extortion and injustice of the British Power

In the 1870s the first serious attempt was made to organise the students as a compact force dedicated to the cause of national regeneration In 1875 a band of young students of Calcutta mostly Brahmo radicals like Krishna Kumar Mitra and Bipin Chandra Pal met the nationalist leader Ananda Mohan Bose who told them that they should form a patriotic students association Surendranath Banerjee too warmly endorsed this proposal A few days later the *Calcutta Students Association* was formed with Ananda Mohan Bose and Surendranath Banerjee as its patrons Both of them soon electrified the students with their fiery patriotic speeches (Translated from Bengali)

A year later in 1876 when the *Indian Association* was founded students of Calcutta Colleges became its backbone Surendranath and Ananda Mohan developed the political life of the then Bengalees around the organised students movement and the students in turn helped to raise them to the level of national leadership (Translated from Bengali)

In 1876, these young college students, under the inspiring leadership of Shibnath Sastri, formed an egalitarian society called *Samadarshi* and took the following pledge To us self-government is the best form of government We do not accept caste distinctions No man should marry before he is 21 no woman before she is 16 We shall try to educate the masses We do not believe in private property, but shall work for national welfare with co operative society as our goal

In 1882-83 came the well known Ilbert Bill agitation and the convictions of Surendranath Banerjee The students of Bengal protested en masse, went on strike and the students movement took a new turn A young student of the period, later on I C S but at heart a patriot wrote thus in his memoirs 'Suren Babu was convicted soon after I had entered school We all wore black badges There were meetings and speeches I could not grasp all of it, but I realised that a new spirit was astir' [9]

THE SWADESHI PHASE (1905 1908)

When the British Secretary of State for India Lord Morley, arrogantly declared that the Partition of Bengal was a settled fact nationalist Bengal promptly retorted we shall unsettle the settled fact! The great battle was on and the students of Bengal played a noteworthy part in it Education Secretary Carlyle issued a fiat that students were debarred from taking part in the Swadeshi Movement The students of Calcutta, en masse tore the notorious Carlyle Circular to pieces and on November 4 1905, held a 5,000 strong students meeting at the College Square Calcutta to form the first militant mass students' organisation of Bengal, the *Anti Circular Society* [10] The two main organisers were Sachindraprasad Basu a 4th year student of the City College Calcutta and Ramakanto Roy, a young engineer Krishna Kumar Mitra editor *Samiyam* was their patron-in-chief The central office was at 4/1 College Square [11]

In Rangpur in North Bengal several hundred students had been expelled from school for taking part in anti partition rallies and for singing patriotic songs The leaders of the *Anti-Circular Society* rushed to Rangpur and set up there on November 8 1905 the first National School [12] This was followed by similar visits to Noakhali, Jessore Khulna and Barisal [13]

The *Anti Circular Society* took the lead in taking out squads singing patriotic songs and selling Swadeshi clothes From an official record, we come to know that within a year by October, 1906, the *Anti-Circular Society* had set up 75 centres for selling Swadeshi clothes and through them they sold Swadeshi clothes worth more than one lakh rupees at controlled price, in just 11 months[14]

A few striking incidents need to be recounted On Boycott Day August 7, 1906 volunteers of *Anti-Circular Society* presented a specimen for India's national flag to Surendranath Banerjee It was a tri colour flag—red, green and gold On it was drawn eight half-open lotuses representing the eight provinces of India, the sun and the crescent moon symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity and in the middle was written in Devanagari script the slogan—Vande Mataram[15]

In February 1906 when a communal riot threatened to break out at Jessore Sachin and his friends of the *Anti Circular Society* rushed to Jessore and restored communal amity there In the same year Sachindraprasad in his annual report urged upon the students of Bengal to work for Hindu Muslim unity[16] It is also well known that patriotic Muslim leaders like Maulavi Liaquat Hossain used to lead the students' squads for picketing

But the most memorable episode so far as the students movement was concerned, took place during the Provincial Political Conference at Barisal in 1906

The District Magistrate of Barisal, Emerson banned the shouting of *Vande Mataram* during the Conference (April 14 15 1906) The leaders accepted the ban but the students led by organisers of the *Anti Circular Society* defied the ban The police used lathis freely Sachindraprasad Basu's jaw was broken while the young student Chittaranjan Guha Thakurta was almost beaten to death But he kept on shouting Vande Mataram[16]

The whole country was electrified and militant nationalism took a new turn after this Barisal Conference sizeable sections of students gradually opting for the path of secret, revolutionary activities This is not the place to write the history of the revolutionary movement, but it will be relevant to recall that almost all the cadres of the revolutionary movement in Bengal, including the martyrs Khudiram Kanailal etc were mostly teen-aged students

FROM NON-COOPERATION TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (1920-34)

After the Jalianwallabag massacre of 1919, Rabindranath renounced his Knighthood in protest and the students of Bengal greeted him in no uncertain terms In September 1920, presiding over the special Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, Lajpat Rai said It is no use blinking at the fact that we are passing through a revolutionary period ' Gandhi gave the call for mass non violent non cooperation In January, 1921, the students of Vidyasagar College Calcutta were the first to respond en masse to his call and offer Satyagraha [17] On January 20, there was complete strike in all the schools and colleges of Calcutta About 3,000 students marched to Mirjapur (now Shraddhanand) Park and declared We shall not go back to our classes until Swaraj is won

Deshabandhu C R Das himself came to the rally and saluted them [1]

A noted historian of our freedom struggle writes that Bengal's students responded in the most striking manner to the call of non-cooperation Gandhiji himself declared that he had no doubt that the students of Bengal would give the lead in our sustained struggle for freedom [18]

Late in 1921, when the Prince of Wales came to Calcutta, there was complete strike in all schools and colleges and students in large numbers lined the streets, waiving black flags at the Prince However in general this mighty wave of students movement was confined to urban centres In only one district Midnapore, did the message of Swaraj reach the rural students One such rural student leader Gunadhar Hazra was arrested and he became the first martyr of Tamluk on April 28 1922

However, nothing comparable to the *Anti Circular Society* grew up in Bengal in this period A teenager Biren Das Dupta built up a *Calcutta Students Association* with Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray as the chairman The young revolutionary student leader of Berhampore, Niranjan Sen Gupta tried to form an All-Bengal Students' Organisation, but could not succeed But a students' conference was invariably held at the time of each provincial political conference The students, almost always, took a more radical stand than the leaders

In December 1927, the Madras session of the Indian National Congress gave the call for a countrywide hartal and black flag demonstration against the Simon Commission The students of Bengal like other regions of India responded enthusiastically to this call On January 20 1928, on the foundation day of the Presidency College, Promode Ghosal General Secretary of the College Union, in his speech gave the call Go back Simon The students of the college wore tricolour badges and sang in chorus Vande Mataram The Raj was furious and when the students of the College went on a strike on February 3 1928 (the day the Simon Commission landed at Bombay) the police mercilessly beat up the strikers including Promode Ghosal [9]

Immediately, students of most of the colleges of Calcutta and the suburbs went on strike For the first time, the girls of Bethune College went on strike A huge protest meeting took place in College Square which was addressed by student leaders and the veteran revolutionary Dr Bhupendra Nath Dutta [10]

Stapleton Principal of Presidency College expelled Promode Ghosal and some other militant students The Scottish Church College authorities expelled their student leader Sachin Mitra from the college In reply students of all colleges of Calcutta went on a total strike on February 17 1928 students of Bengal, spearheaded by the militant students of Presidency Scottish Church and Jadavpur Engineering Colleges organised a Provincial Students' Conference at the Albert Hall and set up the All-Bengal Students' Association (ABSA) The final shape to the ABSA was given in a four day long conference in September 1928 presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru [11] Promode Ghosal became the President Sachin Mitra the Vice President and Biren Das Gupta the Secretary of the ABSA A resolution was passed supporting the demand of complete independence for India and adopting anti-illiteracy activities as ABSA s key task [12]

During the Civil Disobedience Movement more than ten thousand students of Bengal courted arrest at the call of the ABSA Over a thousand of ABSA militants were detained without trial, while a section of its militants led by Biren Das Gupta and Rebati Burman started preaching socialism and became interested in Marxism

Once again in Midnapore the students played a remarkable role, paralysing schools and colleges in the district for nearly the

whole of 1930 As one student militant of 1930 (now a CPI leader) recalls "In Tamluk, thousands of students of the entire subdivision went on strike for 6 long months Hundreds of students went to jail We organised lakhs of peasants to offer satyagraha. It was a memorable experience "

From Chittagong in the east to Midnapore in the west, all Bengal was astir from 1930 to 1934 and the student masses braved fascist terror to keep the flag of revolt flying As Jawaharlal Nehru put it "Bengal presented the most extra-ordinary spectacle Government treated the whole population as hostile and everyone—man woman boy or girl between 12 and 25—had to carry identity cards Dress was regulated, schools were regulated or closed bicycles were not allowed movements had to be reported to the police curfew sunset law military marches Large areas seemed to be in a continuous state of siege India went through this fire of fierce repression, but the frontier province and Bengal suffered most "

The year 1934 was a turning point in many respects—the Civil Disobedience Movement was called off to the great disappointment of the student youth militants the revolutionaries began heart searching in jails the young CPI was declared illegal

STUDENTS AND ANTI IMPERIALIST MASS UPHEAVALS (1937-47)

Thousands upon thousands of student militants of Bengal went through a process of severe heart-searching in the Andamans, in detention camps, in jails in internment areas and at home, in the years between 1934 to 1936 They had felt the tremendous strength of mass struggles and realised the futility of heroic but group armed actions At the same time they were angry with the timidity of the Gadhian leadership The Meerut Trials had added to the prestige of the young communists The overthrow of British rule in India remained the first item on their agenda Such was the background when the 1937 elections took place and revolutionaries rotting in the far off Andamans went on a hunger strike

While the leaders discussed the issue the students of Bengal acted The Bengal Provincial Students Federation and the Bengal Provincial Students' League jointly organised a total stu-

dent strike in Calcutta and brought out a massive student demonstration on August 2, 1937.[7] A mass meeting was held in the Calcutta Town Hall on the same day, and, the ailing poet Tagore came to the meeting and declared that the political prisoners must be brought back from the Andamans. On August 14, 1937, there was complete strike in all the schools and colleges of Bengal, there was serious lathi charge by the police, resulting, in injuries to many students including the student leader Biswanath Mukherjee.[8] Space does not permit greater details but for full one year, 1937-38, the students of Bengal were on a veritable revolt with the demand for the release of all political prisoners. The Congress leaders were lukewarm in their support but leftist leaders including Subhas Chandra Bose, the followers of M. N. Roy, Soumyen Tagore and the illegal CPI gave full support to the student struggle. In July 1938 the Huq Nazimuddin ministry was forced to release ninety per cent of Bengal's political prisoners. This was a great victory for Bengal's student movement.

It would be relevant to mention at this stage that exactly a decade later, in 1946, the next generation of students of Bengal completed this victory, when a sustained month long student struggle in July 1946 culminated in a total general strike of the students of Bengal on July 24 and a massive student demonstration at the Bengal Assembly which forced the then Chief Minister Suhrawardy to promise that all political prisoners including the leaders of the Chittagong uprising would be released by August 31, 1946.[9] Despite the great setback of the communal riots this pledge was honoured and remains a crowning achievement of the student movement.

To go back again, 1940 saw the students of Bengal moving into big mass actions in defence of civil liberties. British imperialism had imposed section 144 and ordinance raj all over Bengal and no major political party had given a call to defy the restrictive orders (except the illegal CPI). At this stage the Bengal Provincial Students' Federation gave the call for defiance of all restrictive orders on January 25, 1940. Ten thousand students paraded Calcutta streets with the war cry 'Down with Sec. 144/Down with British Imperialism'.[10] On January 26 this was repeated and a huge student meeting was held pledging to defend civil liberties.[11] This was a great victory in the struggle against the policy of imperialist repression for the entire war period.

The whole of 1940-41 saw numerous student mass actions in Bengal against imperialist repression Then came the historic August struggle, the Quit India Movement of 1942 Right from August 10 to 30 1942, students of all schools and colleges of Bengal observed complete general strike, despite police firing and wanton repression Nearly a score of students laid down their lives in this struggle [30]

The student upsurge took the character of an unarmed revolt, triggering off mass uprising of the entire populace of Greater Calcutta, headed by the working class, in the post-war years—in November 1945 and again in February 1946 This should be the subject matter of a separate detailed study towards which the writer of this paper has already made a modest attempt [31]

Briefly on November 21 and 22, 1945 and again on February 11 12 and 13, 1946 students of Calcutta followed by students of the rest of India went on strike with two demands release INA prisoners British—Quit India They were supported by working class general strike and barricade fighting with the troops taking place on a mass scale [32] The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on February 13 1946, characterised this as an uprising of the people

Field Marshal Auchinleck the Commander-in Chief of India in a confidential note to the British Cabinet on December 1 1945 also wrote commenting on the Calcutta events of November 21 and 22 1945 "We must be prepared to deal with well organised revolution next spring and the possibility of a serious but less well organised rising at any time during the coming winter" [33]

This was the highest if unwitting tribute to the students of Bengal for having sounded the bugle for the final battle for freedom Space prevents me from talking about the glorious role played by Bengal students against famine and against communalism—both being offsprings of the nefarious policies of our alien rulers Yet, I hope that this all too brief paper has been able to give some idea of the contribution that students of Bengal had made to the cause of freedom

NOTES

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28 *Ibid*
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33 *Amrita Bazar Patrika* Calcutta, August 31, 1942
34 Gautam Chattopadhyay "The Almost Revolution in *Essays in Honour of S C Sarkar* PPH, 1976
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STUDENT MOVEMENT IN BENGAL (1905 34)

AMARENDRA NATH ROY

The student cum-youth movement first became noticeable in the West towards the end of the 19th century In India the study of science and sociology inspired rationalism and objectivity in many young minds Occasionally small associations were formed which became centres of protest against prevailing social superstitions and priestly dogmas In secret meetings of small groups of students in Calcutta the ways to end foreign rule were discussed Before the famous Calcutta Town Hall meeting (August 7, 1905) to protest against the partition of Bengal thousands of students gathered in College Square and demonstrated against the British Government and for the first time 'Bande Mataram' was used as a battle cry on that occasion

Students had sometimes small associations in the Colleges or had local associations in specified areas but no effort was made to organise these on a provincial scale This is true inspite of the fact that mass participation of students in the Swadeshi movement (1905) or the non cooperation movement (1921-22) had largely contributed to the strength of these national movements Secondly, the students were organised in really active provincial associations and generally participated in various national movements by deploying their own trained cadres At times they followed an independent line of action going beyond the declared policy and programme of the Indian National Congress

THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT 1905-11

The boycott movement spread rapidly throughout the province A circular issued by Mr R W Carlyle, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal on October 10 1905 prohibited students from attending political meetings and demonstrations forbade them to take part in picketing and even to shout "Bande

Mataram The students formed with the help of some national leaders, an Anti Circular Society in a public meeting held at College Square on November 4 Very soon numerous meetings, and processions were organised in Calcutta and the districts in defiance of the circular The students under the banner of the Society undertook collection of funds for the movement, carried on vigorous propaganda for the use of Swadeshi goods, the establishment of national schools and colleges, and the inauguration of a National University They were also engaged in a massive campaign to sing and popularise national songs Many students were victimised by the authorities and the Society arranged for the continuance of their studies Sachindra Prosad Bose, a student greatly contributed to the success of the Society Savage repression ultimately appears to have weakened the movement to a certain extent Some active elements, many of them students went underground and strengthened the revolutionary parties which posed a formidable challenge to the British Government during the First World War (1914 1918) But this chapter of the student movement came to a close with the annulment of the partition by the Government in 1911

THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT, 1921

The non cooperation movement finally launched after the resolution adopted at the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress (December 1920) brought the students of British India into the vortex of the country s political struggle An all-India conference of students was in session at Nagpur at the time of the Congress session Initially the approach was cautious but ultimately the majority voted for suspension of studies It must be noted that this conference was not truly a representative one and there was no organisational base Even the provincial organisations were not properly constituted and the delegates attended the conference on an ad hoc basis Already in October and November 1921 Muslim students at Aligarh Calcutta and Madras were stirring In Punjab the Sikh students were also astir at about the same time But it was in January 1921 that the general exodus of students from Colleges and Universities began The students of Bangabasi College, Calcutta appear to have taken the lead early in January 1921 The students of

other Calcutta Colleges followed immediately and soon the movement spread to the districts Chittaranjan Das greeted the students of Bengal in a mass rally held at Mirzapur Square (now Sraddhananda Park) Mahatma Gandhi sent a message congratulating the students and youth of Bengal He visited Bengal and opened the National College in Calcutta on February 4, 1921

The exodus of the students from schools and colleges also took place in other provinces in varying extent The non co-operation movement as a result gained momentum Students formed the vanguard of the volunteer force for propaganda, picketing and enforcement of hartal They took a notable part in the preliminary organisation of the countrywide hartal on February 9 1921 on the occasion of the landing at Bombay of the Duke of Connaught The students also took a leading part in the hartal which took place in Calcutta later in the year on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales Many students were expelled from schools and colleges and many more suffered imprisonment Many of those who took part in the movement formed the core of the new leadership in the next phase of the national struggle Mostly they looked to the end of the year when studies could be resumed

The Congress organisation did not formulate any practical plan to engage them The national schools and colleges were too few and only a few survived For example the National Council of Education established during the swadeshi movement did render very valuable service to the cause of technical education in Bengal A co ordinated effort was made to set up a number of district students associations between 1922 and 1924 The promoters Niranjan Sen Gupta Jogesh Chandra Bhattacharya and Ashutosh Bhattacharya published an English journal *Student* for about eight months Another association, the Calcutta Students Association was formed in 1924 with the active help of Acharya P C Ray and Subhas Chandra Bose This association had a firmer base and functioned till 1928 when it was merged with the All-Bengal Students Association Some of its active members Birendra Nath Das Gupta, Jagadish Chatterjee Kumud Lal Bhattacharya and Durgapada Dasgupta, played a crucial role in the student movement of the next phase (1928 34) The Association established a Home for needy stu-

dents at Sitaram Ghosh Street Calcutta Its members contributed to the success of the hartal on February 3, 1928 when the Simon Commission landed in Bombay

CONSOLIDATION AND DIVISION

The second phase of the student movement in Bengal actually began with the formation of the All-Bengal Students Association (A B S A) in September 1928 This was the first effective representative students organisation in India on a provincial scale It took a leading part in the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-33) and about fifteen thousand students were imprisoned during this period of the national struggle There was serious trouble at Bethune College, Scottish Church College, Serampore College, Murarichand College (Sylhet), Hooghly Mohsin College and Presidency College The incidents at Presidency College were of far-reaching consequence The authorities demanded from the students a code of conduct Already troubles were brewing in the College since the election of Promode Kumar Ghoshal as Secretary of the College Union in 1927 The singing of "Bande Mataram and the display of tri colour flags and badges further annoyed the authorities Ghoshal was asked by H E Stapleton the Principal, to retract and apologise He refused to do so and was unceremoniously suspended On February 3, there were police atrocities on the students including Promode Ghoshal Public indignation was aroused as the nationalist newspapers next day came out with details A general meeting of the students of Calcutta was held on the 17th of February at the Albert Hall with Prof Nripendra Chandra Banerjee as President A committee of three students was appointed by the meeting and was empowered to take further steps Stapleton of Presidency College closed the College and ordered the boarders of Eden Hindu Hostel to vacate the premises Proceedings were instituted against thirteen students of the College The Principal of the Scottish Church College expelled Sachindra Nath Mitra, the elected President of the College Union Similar other incidents were reported from the districts The students turned to Subhas Chandra Bose who arranged for the residence of the boarders of the Eden Hindu Hostel at a large rented house With the help of Subhas Chandra Bose and

Sarat Chandra Bose we were able to secure good publicity in the press They also arranged for our interview with the then Minister of Education, Nawab Musharaff Hussain. In view of the mounting pressure of public opinion the Governing Body of the college appointed a committee with B L Mitter as Chairman The Committee exonerated all but two of the thirteen students and eventually the two were rusticated

Simultaneously, Birendra Nath Das Gupta a student of Bengal Technical College Jadavpur and a member of Calcutta Students Association gathered around him a group of students and was trying to built a students organisation extending over the whole of Bengal He had already brought out a monthly journal in Bengali *Chhatra* A second mass meeting of the students of Calcutta was called on March 6 This large gathering endorsed the decision of the earlier meeting to move forward An All India Bengal Students Conference was held at Sraddhananda Park (then called Mirzapur Square) from 22nd to 25th September, 1928 with Jawaharlal Nehru as President Dr W S Urquhart, the then Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University opened the conference Promode Kumar Ghoshal was the Chairman of the Reception Committee At the end of the Conference the delegates met and formally declared the formation of the All Bengal Students Association Promode Kumar Ghoshal was named President of the Association for the coming year and Shri Birendra Nath Das Gupta the General Secretary Immediately after the conference the task of building effective district associations was taken up in right earnest Workers from Calcutta went to tour the districts

The first meeting of the working committee of A B S A laid down the following programmes

1 Establishment of free Day and Night Schools for imparting elementary education to poor students and the working class

2 Establishment of a Volunteer Corps at Calcutta and its branches in the districts

3 Establishment of a Workers Training College at Calcutta

4 Establishment of Study Circles libraries and reading rooms

5 Establishment of a free Hindi School

6 Maintenance of the journal *Chhatra*

7 Establishment of Physical Culture Centres

8 Collection of important data concerning village life

9 Arrangement for an All India Students Tournament

10 Carrying on active propaganda for the organisation of District Students Associations

The A B S A had also taken up a programme of political activities during the annual session of the Indian National Congress which was held at Calcutta in December 1928 A few attended as delegates and some joined the volunteer force organised by Subhas Chandra Bose

The Simon Commission was due to visit Calcutta on January 19 1929 The A B S A in a public meeting decided to observe hartal on that day Subhas Chandra Bose presided The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee also urged on the people to observe hartal on that day Another Anti Simon Commission demonstration was organised by the A B S A on January 19 1929 The A B S A also arranged a number of public meetings which were often addressed by leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose Jawaharlal Nehru and K F Nariman

The 2nd conference opened on September 30 1929 with Dr Alam as President Mymensingh The Reception Committee formally extended the invitation to him The atmosphere however was strained The proceedings on the first day passed off peacefully Both Shri Rebati Mohan Burman Chairman of the Reception Committee and Dr Alam duly delivered their addresses But on the second day (October 1) there were acrimonious scenes and the President apprehending that normal proceedings could not continue terminated the meeting and declared the conference as closed At the Mymensingh Annual (1929) Conference also there was rift The dissidents after some time called a conference in Calcutta and formed a new organisation the Bengal Presidency Students Association Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya was elected President of the new Association and Kumud Lal Bhattacharyya its General Secretary The student movement in Bengal remained divided for a few years It was a crippling blow The effect however was mitigated to some

extent when after a few months the Civil Disobedience Movement was on and the two organisations often worked jointly

THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

The Congress in its session at Lahore (December 1929) after waiting for a year finally declared complete independence as the immediate goal Gandhiji was subsequently authorised to take suitable steps for the realisation of the goal as early as possible

The central council of the A B S A met and asked the executive to watch the events, recruit volunteers for participating in the salt satyagraha and call a representative convention of students to ascertain their opinion as to the future course of action The convention generally endorsed the line of action recommended by the central council No call was given for general suspension of studies as yet Gandhiji, when approached by us, advised against general suspension The B P S.A did not take any contrary line though it was not a party to the convention In pursuance of the resolution a batch of student workers who had volunteered were sent under the leadership of Harasundar Chakraborty to Midnapore to participate in the Salt Satyagraha Many of the district associations sent their batches of volunteers for Salt Satyagraha

The programme undertaken however, was not considered enough by some members of the A B S A Sachindra Nath Mitra, the then President was one of them After consulting the Working Committee he embarked on a new programme of Satyagraha —the formal defiance of the law of sedition On April 11, 1930 he in collaboration with the Bengal Militia, an organisation recently formed, called a public meeting at College Square for the purpose The B P S A did not signify its formal collaboration but its President Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya with a few associates came forward to join one demonstration despite severe repression Before a large gathering at Cornwallis Square (now Azad Hind Bagh) J M Sen Gupta and four other members Santosh Chatterjee, Prasun Ghose Bibhuti Gupta Bhaya and Suraj Kissen of A B S A were arrested when they attempted to read banned literature The police took no further action then All of them were sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment The Working Committee of the A B S A was formally en-

trusted with the task of conducting the movement Thereafter seditious literature was read out at various parks in Calcutta for a few days more The programme was immediately taken up by the districts In a mammoth meeting of students held under the joint auspices of A B S A and B P S A on April 16 at Coronation Park Dacca, seditious literature was read out Nripen Chakraborty President of Dacca district Branch of A B S A, presided Seven students were arrested there The A B S A concentrated its efforts on the printing and distribution of clandestine leaflets and bulletins as many nationalist newspapers had ceased publication for some time

The student movement had by this time developed such a measure of self-confidence that it could initiate and execute a new programme The Central Council of the A B S A called a second Convention of the students of Bengal The B P S A was invited to send representatives to the convention They did not do so but for some time the two associations worked together The delegates decided to call on the students of Bengal to suspend their studies and devote their full time to the freedom movement. Students in many schools and colleges came out of their classes A joint committee of representatives of the A B S A and the B P S A under the guidance of Basanti Devi for some time conducted this phase of the student movement Student picketers were subjected to various forms of molestation at some colleges of Calcutta such as Bethune College Scottish Church College and the Presidency College The focal point of the battle between the students and the police was however at the Presidency College

Among those severely assulted at the gates of Presidency College were Santi Ranjan Sengupta Chuni Thakur Golam Gaffoor, Gopal Sen Ajit Banerjee, Pratul Chandra Das Indu Bhusan Sarkar Kshiti Mohan Ganguly Pasupati Mukherjee Arabinda Mitra Arunangsu De Ajit Kumar Datta and Amarendra Nath Roy A noticeable feature of the movement was that girl students in large numbers came forward to offer satyagraha particularly in 1932 Miss Kalyani Das a member of the Working Committee of the A B S A and of the Students War Council in 1932 suffered imprisonment Miss Ila Sen Gupta of the A B S A made history on one occasion when she refused to move away before a charge of mounted police Picketers at

government educational institutions such as Hooghly Mohsin College and Howrah Zila School had also to endure severe police atrocities The picketing at the Government College, Rajshahi continued for a month Thereafter, picketing of foreign cloth shops, wholesale and retail was reinforced *India Tomorrow* the English journal of the A B S A continued to carry on a sustained campaign for the civil disobedience movement right from the start inspite of warnings by the authorities Subsequently, however the journal had to discontinue publication as a result of prohibitory orders The A B S A retaliated by largescale printing of clandestine leaflets and bulletins

There were many more instances of barbarous police atrocities on student satyagrahis and demonstrators in the course of the next few months Before the gates of the Howrah Zila School, at Chittagong and at Dacca police action was often indiscriminate Within the campus of the Dacca University, Shri Ajit Bhattacharya, a student died as a result of assault Fifteen others were seriously injured on the same day On September 9 police entered the campus of the Calcutta University and mercilessly beat up all those they could find The police raided the A B S A central office at Calcutta on July 28 arrested the general secretary, Birendra Nath Das Gupta with 40 other students and sealed the premises The members met in private residences sometimes even in the parks and gardens An acting president, nominally the head of the organisation, appeared in public meetings and demonstrations He forthwith named his successor when apprehended Arrests and detentions without trial under the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act took a heavy toll of active student workers The civil disobedience movement gradually declined after September The students began to go back to their classes The Central Council of the A B S A met in Calcutta, took a realistic view of the situation and withdrew the call for suspension of studies The B P S A differed and did not formally withdraw the ban The student associations continued to organise occasional demonstrations of civil disobedience For example both the associations decided to celebrate the Independence Day in 1931

With the signing of the Gandhi Irwin pact on March 5 1931 Civil Disobedience was formally terminated for the time being In the relaxed atmosphere perior to the signing of the pact,

the A B S A decided to call the long overdue session of the All Bengal Students Conference The main session of the conference took place in North Calcutta on March 6 and 7, 1931 The hosts were the North Calcutta District Students Association with Shri Jagaddhatri Kumar Banerjee as Chairman, Reception Committee Kamaladevi Chattopadhyava presided over and Prof C R Reddy Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University opened the conference The arrangements for the conference were on a magnificent scale A Swadeshi Exhibition with a large number of stalls of products of Indian industry was opened by Smt Nellie Sen Gupta A music competition was opened by Smt Sarala Devi Chaudhurani Among the judges were Kazi Nazrul Islam and Krishna Chandra Dey A Health Exhibition was organised with the help of the Tuberculosis Association and the Corporation of Calcutta There were also demonstrations of physical feats every evening Inspite of the serious impact of the civil disobedience movement and short notice a large number of the delegates from the districts attended The terms of the Gandhi Irwin Pact came out just on the eve of the session The youth of the country was in a rebellious mood in regard to the terms of Gandhi-Irwin Pact The atmosphere in the conference was tense J M Sengupta who was a member of the Congress Working Committee addressed the delegates and urged that no precipitate steps should be taken for the sake of unity and discipline in the national movement There was no formal repudiation of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact but dissatisfaction was openly expressed

The execution of Bhagat Singh and his associates rocked the whole country Hartals and demonstrations followed in which the students associations participated actively Meetings were organised by A B S A on March 31 throughout the province demanding commutation of death sentences on Dinesh Gupta and Ramkrishna Biswas

Students who courted arrest in the civil disobedience movement were being asked by certain institutions to give an undertaking of future good conduct The A B S A sent a telegram to Gandhiji informing him of such breaches and organised a campaign of resistance

When civil disobedience was resumed on January 2 1932, both the associations became immediately involved Contingent pre-

parations were already made in anticipation A three member War council with Krishna Kumar Chatterji the President of the A B S A as the leader was invested with full power and responsibility The Government declared both the A B S A and the B P S A unlawful bodies and the offices were sealed The authorities at the same time banned all meetings and demonstrations without previous permission As in 1930 an inner core of active workers met in private residences maintained more than one secret centre for recruitment and deployment of the satyagrahis As succession of Acting Presidents led the public demonstrations it was estimated at that time that 15 000 students courted imprisonment in the movement 3 000 in 1930 31 and 12 000 in 1932 33 The workers of the A B S A also participated in the peasant movement

A batch of workers under the leadership of Prasun Ghose were sent to Delhi to join the 46th session of the Indian National Congress in April 1932 which was banned Prasun Ghose with 26 others reached the venue and began to read the resolutions drafted beforehand They were subjected to assaults and finally arrested The A B S A was under ban and the session of the Annual Conference was clearly impossible in the usual way It was however decided to hold a symbolic session as a gesture of defiance A large number of students assembled on the Calcutta University lawns on July 20 1932 to hold this symbolic session The most notable achievement of A B S A in this phase of the movement was the organisation of the brief but memorable 47th session of the Indian National Congress which was banned by the Government on April 1 1933 at Calcutta in accordance with the decision of the Acting Congress President M S Aney

The workers of the A B S A who were arrested beforehand were Harasundar Chakraborty, Ajit Kumar Datta Arunangshu De Sachindra Nath Mitra Amarendra Nath Roy and Ashwini Kumar Gupta Those who could avoid arrest and make the final arrangements like Sudhin Majumder Gunada Majumder Sakti Bose Jatin Chakraborty Gopen Chaudhuri Jiten Sen and Satya Sen participated in the session

Towards the closing months of 1932, the civil disobedience movement markedly declined throughout the country A large number of students who courted imprisonment under the ban

ner of the A B S A had by that time come out The A B S A utilised their services in the programme of preaching Swadeshi with renewed emphasis A notable event was the organisation of an exhibition exclusively of products of Indian industries

The student organisations in Bengal established contacts with fraternal organisations in other provinces There was a proposal for the formation of an All India Students organisation For this purpose an All India students convention was held on December 30 1929 at Lahore But with the start of the civil disobedience movement in April 1930 all such efforts practically came to an end Another attempt was made in 1931 after the signing of the Gandhi Irwin truce An All India students conference was held on March 26 1931 The committee that organised it was empowered to take effective steps for the formation of an All India Students Federation But unfortunately only the preparatory steps were taken before the civil disobedience movement was on again The help of the revolutionary parties contributed to the rapid growth of the student movement in the early stages Subsequently the leaders of the movement maintained close links with the Bengal Congress leadership After the split within the student movement the two factions in the B P C C nominally adherents of Subhas Chandra Bose and J M Sen Gupta at times contributed to the widening of the rift However leading members in both organisations generally worked with restraint and moderation The two student associations also worked jointly on several occasions particularly when the civil disobedience movement was on At the time of split the uncommitted students with Marxist leanings remained mostly with the parent body i e the A B S A When therefore most of the student workers who had links with the revolutionaries in both organisations were in prison in 1930 and 1931 they took over the reigns of the movement and the A B S A was able to maintain its base and take a notable part in the civil disobedience movement of 1930 33 particularly in 1932 33

The students of Bengal at that time came mostly from the lower middle class and in the initial stages the dominant ideology was patriotism There was no programme to link the freedom movement with the struggle of the toiling masses The class conflicts in Indian society were imperfectly understood The student movement was however gradually drawn towards socialism The

resolution passed at the All India Students Convention held in March 1931 at Karachi was clearly indicative of the new outlook.

NOTES

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THE ARMY IN INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

SANTIMOY RAY

Army constitutes one of the three main pillars of the state, the other two being the bureaucracy and the social relations *The role of the Army in a socio political revolution* may be active or passive The neutral or passive role of the Army helps the other struggling forces of revolution to become more aggressive Again, simply for the fault of being neutral (keeping aloof) the Army may, very often be subjected to attacks by the armed loyalist forces and on such occasions they are compelled for their self defence alone to have recourse to rebellion which leads to revolution As the troops are by and large drawn from among the common people the impact of various movements cannot but react upon them for they are constantly being influenced by the actions and reactions of various events within the society

Among the national and democratic revolutions of modern times the freedom struggle in 1576 of the Dutch Marines (with their fleet) against Spain was the first to occur During the Puritan Revolution in England an important section of the Army under the leadership of Cromwell, Winstanley and Lilburn took part in the revolution and carried it forward to success[1] The neutral role of the Royal Guards who refused to carry out the orders of Louis XVI to disperse the mob by force, helped the revolution in France in 1789 to move forward Louis XVI had to bow down to the Parisian mob, accept their demands and issue the declaration summoning the Estates General

In Russia during the reign of Nicholas I an anti Tsarist revolutionary cell grew up among the army right from 1827 Such rebels called the Decembrists" were in most cases sentenced to death But their successors again formed secret revolutionary cells among the army Ulianov Lenin and his comrades took up

the leadership of these revolutionary cells During the revolution of 1905 the rebellion of the marine force of the battleship *Potemkin* in the Black Sea deserves special mention

Both during the revolution in 1905 and the October Revolution in Russia the naval ratings played important roles Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were the builders and organisers of this revolt in *1917*

Very recently Bangladesh (1968-71), Algeria, Cuba Iraq, Egypt and South Yemen provide us with glowing examples of the progressive role of the army In every case they stood by the revolutionary and democratic masses and became their equal partners in revolutionary activities

The question on the role of the army in India s freedom struggle has not yet been properly brought into focus The purpose of the present study is to set forth certain noteworthy facts for appraisal But before that we should look into the concept of freedom struggle itself

If *independence means achieving freedom from British rule,* the phase of the Wahabi movement must be regarded as the prologue of Indian freedom struggle From the political objective as well as *from the organised effort of the Wahabis 'to wage* a relentless crusade against the British rule', none can deny their role as fighters for freedom The ultimate object had been the *overthrow of British power in India for which they had been* trying to make converts amongst the army Sayed Ahmed of Bareilly the Wahabi leader paid special attention to this task *right from the beginning and with this end in view he himself* joined the army[3] The elaborate report available of the various conspiracy cases of the period such as Hyderabad, Madras and *Vellore cases of 1839 the* Patna case of *1845* and the Rawalpindi case of 1852 brings out enough facts about various tactical devices, resorted to by them to establish contact within the army *Usually* such contacts were being made with the help of 'Pandits' and 'Mollas' Wahabi leaflets and handbills calling upon people to launch a crusade against the British and to set up a divine kingdom were distributed among the army[4]

Since 1830 onward the Wahabi movement spread far and wide, from Chittagong to Peshawar and from Madras to Kashmir

Whatever little evidence of organisational skill can be detected in the great revolt of 1857 was mainly contributed by the Wahabi fighters In all their activities Rani Luxmi Bai Saheb Kunwar Singh and Mangal Pandey showed little capacity for organisation and foresight The only exception was Syed Ahmed Ullah of Faizabad

The Faraizi movement led by Shriatullah was in the main a protest of the poor and oppressed peasantry The revolts of Barasat and Faridpur under the leadership of Nisar Ali (Titu Mir) and Mohamed Muslim (Dudu Miah) respectively were the instrumental music as it were of the Indian liberation struggle It prepared the background for (in 1839) Mubariz Uddeullah of Hyderabad to form revolutionary cells among the army In this connection a fact finding commission under the leadership of Frazer and Malcolm remarked that Mubariz had not only entertained treasonable designs against his sovereign (The Nizam) but also had hostile intention more specially directed against the British Government as manifested by the extraordinary pains he and agents had taken to tamper with the allegiance of native infantry especially at Secunderabad and Nagpur Mubariz was sentenced to transportation for life (in 1840) He died in Golkunda Fort in 1854 In 1839 the military officer in charge of Vellore informed the Government of Madras by a letter that one Cowda Miah was trying to pick up friendship and also distributed seditious handbills regularly Under the pressure of socioeconomic conditions the army personnel in Bihar also fell an easy prey to Wahabi influence A Government Report of 1845 said that a wide conspiracy was going on to tamper with the allegiance of the native officers and sepoys in Danapur Contact was established between Pir Bux of the 1st Regiment No 1 and Rahmat Ali Wahabi Chief Saif Ali was the ring leader of this conspiracy He propagated sedition among the army with the help of Pandit Saif Ali eluded arrest He remained an enigma in the history of Indian freedom struggle of the period

During the Rawalpindi conspiracy case in 1853 it was learnt from a number of letters written by Mushi Muhammed Ali of the 4th Native Infantry that the conspirators along with Akram Ullah of Sitana and Hussain Ali Khan of Patna were trying to

foment a revolt in the army Kazi Muhammed of Meerut and Abbas Ali of Ludhiana were also connected with this conspiracy While commenting on this kind of effort of the Wahabis, Dr Qeyamuddin Ahmad writes "It is to the credit of the Wahabi leaders that they realised very early in their struggle with the English that the Indian army occupied a key position in it.[6] This was the main instrument of the power of the English and if this could somehow be 'neutralised' half the battle would be won It was this realisation which made the Wahabi agents repeatedly bring home to the Indian sepoys the full extent of the immense power wielded by them and of the dependence of the English on them The Wahabis tried to establish contact with every military centre from the Sutlej to Calcutta

In the great Revolt of 1857 diverse currents of revolt converged and turned into a tidal wave It is common knowledge to all the students of history how the Indian soldiers reacted to the socio-political situation of 1857 The Wahabi freedom fighters were no doubt the strongest of all those currents It is unfortunate that the role of the Wahabis has not yet been properly evaluated

As an upshot of the great Revolt of 1857 the organisational set up of the Indian army was thoroughly over-hauled The Armoured Division and the Artillery were fully staffed with English officers alone Besides the department of military intelligence also assumed a very important role The chief object of this was to take strong measures against the potential rebels[8] As a result of differential treatment in the army there arose two distinct classes on racial lines[9] After 1857 the activities of the Wahabis tended to be on the wane Strong measures were taken against them in 1863 and the first chapter of anti-British liberation struggle came to a close

Thereafter the freedom struggle entered a new phase A great social and political awakening convulsed the country during the period 1885 to 1900[10] This new path can be traced in Maharashtra in 1898 Baba Thakur Saheb Dewan of a small native state near Poona, was the first to start a secret society in India after Balwant Phadke Round about the same time "Lotus and Dagger Society" formed in London was the first organised Indian secret society in a foreign land The name of

Aurabindo Ghosh is associated with this organisation Accord ing to Aurabindo Ghosh Thakur Saheb's foresight made him realise that there must be a considerable section in the Army to promote the cause of revolution On this assumption he directed his secret efforts towards this end and succeeded in winning over two or three regiments of the Indian Army Therefore among other activities the formation of secret cells in the Army was regarded by both of them as their main task In this report Thakur Saheb made special attempts to contact sympathetic Army personnel in the native states and to form secret cells with them [11]

In 1898 Aurabindo Ghosh called Jatin Bandyopadhyay from Bengal and got him a post in the Bodyguard Division of the Maharaja of Baroda [2] Having worked there for sometime Banerjee came back to Bengal and began to assist Barin Ghosh in the task of forming revolutionary secret societies There are sufficient grounds for believing that the two secret societies named Abhinava Bharati and 'Mitra Mela in Western India tried since their inception to pick up contacts among the Army in the native states Later in an editorial column of the periodical named *Jugantar* dated 18th August 1907 Aurabindo Ghosh remarked The foreign government has to recruit most of the soldiers from among the people Therefore if the revolutionists secretly disseminate the message of independence to these native soldiers a noble job will be done when at least they have to encounter the imperial power the revolutionists not only gain the well trained native soldiers but also get the benefit of the arms and ammunition which the Imperial power provides to their soldiers ' It is learnt from the Rowlatt Commission Report that of the few booklets of this early period *that helped the revolutionary parties to grow up one was named Mukti Kon Pathey* (Whither Freedom) and the other was *Bartaman Rananeeti* (Present Strategy of Struggle)

A quotation from *Mukti Kon Pathey* runs thus The assistance of Indian soldiers must be obtained They should be made to realise the misery and wretchedness of the country [15] Another excerpt from it is as follows they accept service in the Government of foreign rulers still they were nothing but men made of flesh and blood They possessed the power of original think-

ing Therefore, when the revolutionaries had explained to them the woes and miseries of the country, they in proper time, would swell the ranks of the revolutionaries with arms and weapons given to them by their rulers As it was possible to persuade the soldiers in this way, the modern British Raj of India did not allow the cunning Bengalies to enter into the rank of the Army Revolutionaries were asked to tap army source for securing arms (*Jugantar* editorials)[9]

Naturally the inflammable writings in the newspapers and periodicals of the time brought about an awakening of political consciousness of the Army personnel The news magazines referred to were *Poona Baibhab* (1899) *Madavinya* (1897) *Kesharı Kal* (1897) *Bihari Bande Mataram* (1906) *Nava Sakti Kanna Yogin* (1906) *Pioneer* (Bombay) *Sahavak* (Lahore) *Zamindar* (Lahore)

During 1907-1908 there was a massive movement in the Punjab against the Colonisation Bill Sardar Ajit Singh Lala Lajpat Rai and others were arrested in this connection "Resentment ran high among the Sikh soldiers in different barracks" It was too much for the military authorities to view the matter complacently Lord Kitchener did not allow it to take an untoward turn[10]

It will be relevant here to take into account the impact that the political atmosphere and the specific grievances of the peasantry exercised on the Army In a note to the Viceroy titled *The Effect of the Present Unrest on the Native Army* dated 12 5 1907 the Commander-in Chief wrote that there had been a few cases where attempts were made to tamper with the loyalty of the troops, but there was a "consensus" among Generals and Commanding Officers that there was no cause for anxiety 'for the great majority of native troops' Kitchener noted that "the seditious propaganda which has been raging so violently during recent months must in course of time have affected the feeling and even the loyalty of the native troops' "The spoken utterances" of agitators had, according to him, "received a greater degree of attention' Listing a few prominent cases Kitchener singled out Sikh soldiers among whom "a certain amount of unrest had been created He noted that Sikh soldiers attended "highly seditious meetings in Multan

and Ferozepur, openly' showed their 'approbation of the utterances of the speakers, and disregarded in some instances the orders of their Commanding Officers regarding attendance at such meetings' He noted that in Rawalpindi Division, where seditious literature was distributed among the ranks, there were speeches by agitators who visited the lines of the native regiments At Multan Sikh sepoys are said to have garlanded Ajit Singh who had been most conspicuous in agitation regarding the sepoys'

The Government records speak of continued activity among sections of peasantry in the months of June and July, particularly in the Lyalpur district The Home Department on 18 6 1907 received information that a certain historic Sikh temple in Lahore district was "a centre from which sedition was being disseminated among the Sikh, and that at a 'large meeting of Sikh Zamindars" on 6 7 1907 in Lyalpur 'it was agreed that they should encourage their relations in the Army to give trouble to their officers' [8] The government records also speak of disaffection reaching Sikh regiments 'in letters from their relations' There is also a compilation of reports titled "Endeavours of certain Sikh sepoys to spread sedition It concerns only the North West Frontier Province Some of the essential points contained therein are A Havildar and a sepoy of Fortyfive Sikh Regiment stationed at Peshawar holding Arya Samajist views attempted to 'incite men of their regiment

At a meeting on 12 5 1907 in Bannu a Sikh sepoy was received with "great applause' when he said (presumably in connection with the deportation) that India had been destroyed and people should "better eat poison"

The S P of Bannu wrote on 20 5 1907 that the 'Sikhs of the garrison are all disaffected They say they have been badly treated They also say openly that they would refuse to fire on Indians if there was any trouble"

The Special (Intelligence) Branch received information on 1 6 1907 that four Sikh sepoys expressed resentment to an Afghan that 'soldiers were underpaid agriculturists were overassessed and traders were over-taxed'

A junior Sikh Officer of the 19th Cavalry said that the "Sikhs were highly displeased at the capture" of Ajit Singh

The Special Branch received information that on 6 6 1907 three Sikh sepoys visiting a silk merchant's shop regretted that Hindus and Muslims of Peshawar did not combine and added that Sikhs were 'ready 'If Amir of Kabul sent an expedition against India, the English would lose it' Two Sikh sepoys visited a mosque in Kissa Khani Bazar and made similar remarks

Another report mentioned that two Companies of Sikhs belonging to No 124 Regiment were questioned whether they were "unwilling to suppress disorder in Punjab' "Sepoys are reported to be saying openly that if Government asks them to fire upon the people of India they will refuse to do so'

Outside India Shyamaji Krishnavarma Har Dayal, Savarkar and Dr Tarak Nath Das were then preaching sedition through their news magazine *The Indian Sociologist* They also arranged a meeting in memory of the martyrs of the great revolt of 1857 Henceforth a machinery was also set up to propagate the account of the great revolt in the Army barracks [19]

From 1909 onward Europe was under the shadow of a World War Jatin Mukherjee, the great revolutionary leader brought different political factions of Bengal including the Adi (original) *Anushilan or Calcutta Anushilan Jugantar party and others* under a single leadership After the departure of Aurabindo Ghosh he re-established contact with the Army A Sikh soldier was contacted through one Naren Chattopadhyay of Shipur According to Dr Jadu Gopal Mukherjee, Benoy Bhushan Datta Bhumrao and Vir Savarkar's brother Dr G D Savarkar opened a contact centre in Maharashtra and according to the same authority Sri Ashutosh Ghosh, a teacher of Khidirpur maintained regular contact with the Punjab Centre Arrangement had been made to contact the army stationed at Fort William Calcutta [20] This is also corroborated from the Soviet sources "Early in 1910, the official Anglo Indian press featured the sensational news of the arrest of ten soldiers of the 10th Jat Regiment which was stationed in a suburb of Calcutta The news agitated the public, all the more because the administration offered no explanation for its action and tried to belittle its importance The regimental Commander was forced to take

'a lengthy holiday The entire regiment was disarmed and dispatched by sea to a remote spot in Sindh Province

It was rumoured that in course of the arrest of the soldiers, an armed clash ensued resulting in the death of several men It was also rumoured that the arrested soldiers had been put in solitary confinement in Alipur prison Important evidence has been discovered in Soviet archives from the report of the Russian Consulate General (stationed at Calcutta) to St Petersburg of February 6 1910 According to A V Rail ov, the announcement of the arrest of 10 Sepoys had been wrong Consul Arseneyev named as many as 35 and even 42 Sepoys on trial (letter dated 11th March 1911) The report states that during the Christmas holidays in 1909 a ball was to be held at the residence of the Bengal Governor to which the Viceroy the Commander in Chief and all the high ranking officials of Calcutta were to be invited The 10th Jat Regiment was to do sentry during the ball The undercover patriotic organisation which had established contact with the soldiers decided to take advantage of this convention ball to blow up the ball room and thus destroy the colonial Government [21]

On the eve of the First World War when war between Britain and Germany was a certainty Jatin Mukherjee and Rash Bihari Bose made joint efforts in India and particularly in the northern zone to establish contact with Army personnel in different barracks [22]

Outside India the famous Berlin Committee was formed and supported by the Government of Germany Under the leadership of Dr Tarak Nath Das Raja Mahendra Pratap Moulana Barkatullah Obeidullah Sindhi Lala Hardayal Dr Bhupen Dutta Abinash Bhattacharya Birendra Chattopadhyay C R Pillai and others arrangements were made for importing arms and ammunition from abroad In this connection the Rowlatt Committee observes 'It was supported by efforts to evolve a system to affiliate all those behind the movement into an efficient working unit the principal aim of which would be to cause mutiny among native troops in British India and in different centres engaged in war Here was the confluence of four main streams of Indian revolutionary current—Gadar Pan Islamic revolutionary brotherhood Anushilan and Jugantar

One of the prominent Indian revolutionaries was given charge to direct a campaign to win over Indian war prisoners captured by the Germans Subsequently Anushilan and Jugantar coordinated this plan of action and made job division Links were established between the revolutionaries and the Jat Regiment No 10 stationed at Fort William in Calcutta

'Meanwhile endeavours were going on inside the country to procure arms and ammunition to tamper with the allegiance of the native soldiers and to win them over Only in Bengal 1200 revolutionaries were arrested and confined to jail custody But still attempts to organise the revolt went on unabated Leaders and workers of Anushilan Samity such as Rash Behari Bose Sachindra Nath Sanyal, Girija Dutta Anukul Chakraborti, Amrita Sarkar Pandit Paramananda, Prithvi Singh Azad, Joal Singh Mohan Singh Pandit Jagatram Bishnu Ganesh Pingley Binayak Rao Kapley and others moved from Lahore to Dacca and thence to Central Province to win over the support of the Army For the said objective Rash Behari Bose and Sachindra Nath Sanyal sent Damodar Swarup to Ahmedabad, Dila Singh to Benaras Biswanath Pandey and Mangal Pandey to Ramgarh and Jubbalpur Kartar Singh and Prithvi Singh to Lahore Ambala Ferozepur and Rawalpindi Bishnu Ganesh Pingley to Meerut Pandit Jagatram to Peshawar and Pandit Paramananda to Jhansi and Kanpur Sardar Madan Singh and Hazra Singh established contact with Sikh Regiment No 26 and Sardar Harnam Singh succeeded in trying to win the military Cantonment at Mianwali'[23]

At the end of January 1915 Rash Behari deputed Hardayram to assess the political situation in Jullundur to establish contact with the Dogra Regiment stationed there and to win them over Hira Singh Charar was sent to Jacobabad Piara Singh to Kohat and Sant Gulab Singh and Harnam Singh to Bannu on similar missions

All these envoys brought encouraging reports The 35th Regiment of Bannu fully assured their support as soon as they were transferred to Rawalpindi Mohan Singh and Gurmukh Singh brought similar reports from Naushera Peshawar Moti Mardan Jhelum and Rawalpindi Soldiers at Kapurthala

Meerut Agra, Allahabad, Benaras, Ferozabad and Lucknow expressed similar willingness to take part in the rebellion at the appointed time Sant Wasakha Singh was sent to Delhi to establish contact with Indian soldiers there Sucha Singh and Kartar Singh Saraba went to Meerut on a similar mission Pingley was already there They were successful in establishing link with Inder Singh and some other men of the 12th Cavalry Mian Mir and Ferozepur Cantonments were the main entry of activity of Punjab Ghadarites Dafadar Lacharan Singh, Sowar Lal Singh and Natha Singh promised to side with the revolutionary Nidhan Singh and Kartar Singh Saraba who had frequently visited Ferozepur They ultimately prevailed upon the soldiers of the 6th Pathan to hand them over to the keys of the arms depot. 'Because of the general discontent among them due to excessive loss of life among the Indian soldiers as compared to the British on European front. the British position in India at that time was shaky'[4] On receiving encouraging reports Rash Behari Bose took over the general direction and co-ordinated with other revolutionary groups of Bengal led by Jatin Mukherjee He expected that as soon as the Sepoy uprising would turn into a popular insurrection Afghanistan and the neighbouring tribal people would be persuaded to accord diplomatic recognition to the revolutionary Government He mainly pinned his hopes on the defection of the troops, particularly men of the 23rd Cavalry posted at Mian Mir Cantonment in the suburbs of Lahore and the 26th Punjabis posted at Ferozepur The 28th Pioneers and the 12th Cavalry posted at Meerut were also encouraged

Repeated defeats suffered by the British during the first phase of the World War had a very adverse effect on the morale of the Army To fight for national independence appealed to them more than to die for alien Government. Association with Rash Behari helped the native soldiers to regain their good sense and confidence At the time barely twelve thousand British troops were stationed in India The Indian troops therefore decided to launch a sudden attack on the British Army defeat them, imprison them and thereafter proclaim a National Government They were then permitted to keep their arms with them inside the Fort Rash Behari Bose, who was an absconder

carrying a reward of several thousand for his apprehension, could then be found in fort discussing plans and programmes of the future revolution with the army personnel" He had his entry there by introducing himself as a kinsman of some one of them. It was possible because the sentry at the gate also happened to be a trusted follower of Rash Behari When these things came to light, the Sepoys were no longer allowed to keep the guns with them After the daily parade all the guns were to be deposited in the Magazine room and outsiders were not allowed entry inside the Fort[26] This is fully corroborated by the Sedition Committee Report

Besides these endeavours of the "Jugantar" and the "Anushilan" parties two other efforts also deserve mention In America the 'Gadhar" party made serious efforts to collect money and to procure arms and ammunition in order to take part in the armed revolutionary struggle in India To help the Indian revolutionary movement in America the seeds of insubordination and patriotism in the Indian Army and the ideas of revolt in the public at large were sown The Liberty pamphlets published by the revolutionaries like Bhai Bal Mukund found their way into the Army stationed at Dehradun, Kasauli, Ambala Cantonments and such other military stations in the Punjab and U P[27] Exciting articles were written, one such being *Bande Mataram* from Geneva under the caption 'What shall we do'[28]

"Our revolutionary movement must cultivate open war against our tyrants This war can only be successful if we are backed by the masses and the regular army" Baba Sohan Singh was the President of Gadhar Party which had also a good number of contacts in the Army. The Punjabi soldiers were specially noted for valour and bravery So the members of the Gadhar Party as soon as they landed at Budge Budge in Calcutta from a ship named *Komagata Maru* were engaged in a pitched battle Prior to this, in a conference of the Party held in Stockholm (in 1914) it was resolved that the organisation should be affiliated to political parties in India and that contact should also be established with Indian soldiers abroad"[29] Many Sikhs were able to escape to Punjab Hundreds of them then took upon themselves the task of working amongst the army[30]

'Pan Islamic Brotherhood was another group associated with these efforts Most of the Muslim youth who passed out from Deoband School went abroad for higher studies joined this organisation and built it up They took upon themselves the task of making India free from foreign yoke Obeidullah Sindhi was their leader and Anwar Pasha the Egyptian revolutionary set up centres throughout the Middle East North West Frontier Province Sindh the Punjab Kashmir Iraq Iran and Hedzaj in Arabia They distributed leaflets and handbills among soldiers and outside India in various cantonments of Basrah, Malay Singapore Java and Sanghai (Rowlatt Commission)[31] Efforts were made to evolve a system to affiliate all those behind the movement into an efficient working unit, the principal aim of which would be to cause mutiny amongst native troops in British India and different centres of war A prominent Indian revolutionary was given charge to direct a campaign to detach Indian prisoners of war captured by the Germans from British ranks from their allegiance"[32] It was decided by common agreement that the flag of independence would be unfurled on 21st February 1915 But one Kripal Singh betrayed the plot and the British Government cracked down on them followed by large scale arrests Pandit Jagatram was arrested in Peshawar and Pingley while carrying bombs and pistols was arrested in Meerut Cantonment from the lines of the 12th Cavalry regiment Sardar Harnam Singh the Sikh Havildar of the 9th Infantry Division Sardar Narayan Singh and Sardar Mohanlal carrying pistols were arrested at Maimo in Burma The Government also disbanded native army divisions at many places Indian sepoys at places like Ambala and Ferozepur who came into close contact with the revolutionaries were courtmartialled and shot dead"[33] About this time nearly 200 rebel soldiers in Basrah were blown up with cannon

Both in the Rowlatt Commission Report and in David Petrie's report on the revolutionary activities in the Far East we find the following observations 'The revolutionaries were to go through China, Japan Borneo and Siam into Burma In the west it was planned to Suez canal to go through Persia and Afghanistan and thence to the West Coast of India 'The scheme which depended on Moslem disaffection was directed

against the North West Frontier 'But the other scheme relied upon the Gadhar Party of San Francisco and the Bengali revolutionaries'[34] In Germany, through the Berlin Committee, the revolutionaries propagated the ideas and the concept of one nationality and freedom amongst the army and established quite a few study centres amongst the Indian prisoners of war The Rajputs and the Sikhs addressed the revolutionaries with *Bande Mataram* Dr Tarak Nath Das a founder member of Gadar, was entrusted with this task Thanks to the constant campaign both Hindus and Muslims participated in their mutual festivities[35]

In 1915 a few Indian revolutionaries including Heramba Gupta Obeidullah Sindhi Moulana Barkatullah and others went to Constantinople as representatives of the Berlin Committee It was their main task to distribute propaganda leaflets among the Indian Army stationed at Mesopotamia and thus to draw and involve them into a rebellion Probably the rebellion in Basrah was their handiwork and it failed owing to the treachery of one Muhammed Sherifi the Mayor of Hedjaz Some of its participants were arrested while on their way to Persia and sentenced to death The case instituted in this connection is known as "the Silk Conspiracy At least thirty revolutionaries all Muslim students from the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province, were condemned to death and the rest were sentenced to long term imprisonment.[36]

In the Far East, the 5th Native Light Infantry, a Muslim unit of Indian soldiers stationed at Singapore in the Far East started rebellion on 15th February, 1915 and declared independence The mutinous Indian soldiers put the British Army personnel under arrest, captured Singapore and held it under their control for two weeks At last the rebellion was put down, only with the help of allied Japanese war-ships[37] Ismail Manjur and Mohanlal were the chief leaders of revolt Capital punishment was inflicted upon the participants of whom Rasullah Imtiaz Ali and Razhmuddin were executed on 8th March, 1915 and Havilder Band Suleiman, Naik Munshi Khan, Naik Jaffar Ali Khan and Abdur Reza Khan on 13th March 1915

At the same time Bhagat Singh, Atar Singh, Tannar Singh,

Rul Singh, Hazara Singh, Tarner Singh and Bir Singh were blown upon cannon-fire Besides, 65 army mutineers were killed Simultaneously there was revolt in Malay Here the mutineers belonged to the State Guard Unit of Malay Subedar Dande Khan, Zamadar Chisti Khan, Havildar Rahamat Ali Khan Sepoy Hakimah and Havildar Abdul Gani were sentenced to death They were courtmartialled on 23rd March 1916 After having put down the rebellion in the Far East, two conspiracy cases were started Mohanlal, the main accused in Mandalay and Burma Conspiracy Case was charged with causing mutiny in the military barracks of the Government and was hanged in Mandalay Jail in January 1916 Before his death the Governor paid a visit to the jail and proposed to Mohanlal that if he repented and prayed for mercy and pardon the capital punishment inflicted on him might be commutted In reply to this Mohanlal is reported to have said that If anybody is to beg pardon the British must do it, for they have no right at all to stay here in this country

About 200 soldiers of the mutinous Baluch Regiment No 130 were served with various prison terms and Mustafa Hussain, sentenced to death was later hanged The names of Lala Hardayal, Rash Behari Bose, Barkatulla and others were divulged in the course of this conspiracy case The approver deposed that 'red', 'blue' and 'green' were the symbolic terms used respectively for the Hindus the Muslims and the Sikhs Mohanlal, Kriparam Harnam Singh Kala Singh and Badudeb Singh, all accused in this case, were sentenced to death by hanging and Chatram Kapur Singh, Harjeet Singh, Badan Singh, Gujar Singh Ramaraksham etc were sentenced to transportation for life [33]

After the failure of the rebellion in Northern India the rebel soldiers in various cantonments were put to death and the rest involved in the famous Lahore Conspiracy Case on the charge of waging war against the Government Ninety of the accused in this case were given capital punishment in three successive batches and eight hundred sentenced to transportation for life It is learnt from the deposition of the approver of the case that the revolutionaries had been to various cantonments in Meerut.

Agra Kanpur Allahabad Ferozepur and Ambala etc where they tampered with the allegiance of the native soldiers [40]

Sri Bishnu Ganesh Pingley Sardar Jagat Singh Sardar Suren Singh and Sardar Harnam Singh were among those who were sentenced to death [41] Balwant Singh Harnam Singh Fundra Kedar Singh Khusal Singh Nand Singh Prithwi Singh Rule Singh Dewan Singh Mohan Singh Wasan Singh Bhai Param anandh Pandit Parmanda Hirderam Ram Saran Jairit Rao Gurmam Singh Josh Singh Sher Singh Pandit Jagat Ram Hidhan Singh Keshar Singh Bishkha Singh Roop Singh Bhel Singh Keher Singh Udam Singh Piyara Singh Kripal Singh Indra Singh Lal Singh Kala Singh Natha Singh Shib Singh Sajan Singh etc were among those who were sentenced to transportation for life [42]

The most important of the charges as framed by the Magistrate in the Benaras Conspiracy Case of 1916 was to cause disaffection and resentment in various military barracks and to incite them to rebellion by distributing seditious booklets One of the accused in this case was the revolutionary leader Sri Sachindra Nath Sanyal a colleague of Rash Behari He was sentenced to transportation for life Sri Damodar Swarup Ganeshlal Nalini Mukherjee Kalipada Jitendra Nath Sanyal and others accompanied him to transportation [4]

The heroic endeavours to bring about rebellion culminating into a revolutionary upsurge with the help of the Army fell through during the years of the First World War between 1914 and 1918 Despite glowing evidence of communal unity and uncommon bravery lack of political consciousness was a vital factor The main source of revolutionary inspiration was cut off with the fall of Germany Secondly as the leaders of the rebellion could not project to the people any idea about their future state and society the revolution could not rest upon mass consciousness [44] Thirdly there are reasonable grounds to doubt the patriotism of many of those who provided the revolution with programme and leadership from abroad

Scramble over money jealousy inferiority complex and narrow mindedness among the rebels served as a stumbling block to the progress of the national revolution Those who

followed the direction of the leaders and sacrificed their lives were undoubtedly nobler though their names find no place of honour in history. There is an urgent need for research on them.

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CHANDRA SINGH GARHWALI

AJAY SINGH RAWAT

In the career of Chandra Singh Garhwali the spirit of nationalist defiance within the army epitomised itself, much to the concern of the ruling establishment. During the First World War, Chandra Singh had been promoted to the rank of Havildar, but afterwards he was demoted.[1] The country was then swept by Gandhi's charisma and non cooperation movement. Chandra Singh was greatly influenced by Gandhi and his teachings.[2] Besides, he became an ardent supporter of the Arya Samaj.[3] He had started preparing his colleagues for the day when they would all quit the army and join the national movement on instruction from the Congress.[4]

In 1930, during the Salt Satyagraha, Chandra Singh's battalion (2/18 Royal Garhwal Rifles) was posted in Peshawar. Chandra Singh often slipped out from his unit and went to the bazar to collect those newspapers banned in the cantonment area. During night he used to relate political happenings to the Garhwali troops.[5] At Peshawar Chandra Singh was called Ustadji by Garhwali soldiers.

After Martin, the Commander, had told Garhwali troops that they might have to shoot the local Muslims to protect the local Hindus, Chandra Singh warned his men about British designs to foster Hindu-Muslim friction. A secret meeting was organised by Chandra Singh in which nine representatives of Garhwali troops were present. Finally it was decided that the Garhwalis would not fire at the Muslims.[6]

On April 23, 1930, Capt. Rickett with seventy-two Garhwali soldiers was deployed to the Kissa Khani Bazar of Peshawar. Chandra Singh writes Rahul Sankrityayan was purposely left out of the task. The Britishers somehow informed of Chandra Singh's plan, avoided him. However, Chandra Singh made an

excuse that the troops had only a bottle of water each which would not suffice in an emergency Quarter Master Chapelle was impressed with Chandra Singh s argument and thus under the pretext of taking water for the G rhwali soldiers he soon joined the advance party at Peshawar town Rahul Sankrityayan s view does not appear to be correct because if the British had known about Chandra Singh s plan they would have arrested him immediately and the Garhwalis would not have been deployed to Peshawar Furthermore Chandra Singh would never have been permitted to join the other troops Chandra Singh Garhwali also did not accept Rahul Sankrityayan s view when I asked him, though he did corroborate the excuse of taking water for the soldiers

The Garhwali troops entered the gate of Kissa Khani Bazar in wo files Down below there were thousands of unarmed Pathans and a sizable number of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan s followers who were picketing shops and dissuading the shop keepers from selling foreign foods [9]

Captain Rickett ordered the crowd to vacate the bazar but his orders fell on deaf ears After this the British platoon fired blank rounds But still the crowd did not disperse On witnessing this open defiance Rickett shouted "Garhwalis three rounds of fire Chandra Singh Garhwali who was standing on his left hand side intervened immediately and shouted Garh walis don t fire ' The troops obeyed Chandra Singh s command and put their weapons on the ground [10] They were then arrested At the court martial proceedings the Garhwalis said We will not shoot our unarmed brethren you may blow us from the guns if you like [11] Tendulkar is of the view that seventeen men were sentenced one to transportation for life another to fifteen years imprisonment and the rest to terms of rigorous imprisonment varying from three to ten years [12] Chandra Singh Garhwali told me that for this act of disobedience the members of the 2/18 Garhwal Rifles was given five years of departmental punishment Sixtyseven soldiers were dismissed and sixteen rank holders were given three to twenty years of imprisonment Chandra Singh was given death sentence which was later reduced to life imprisonment

As a sequel to this military disobedience censorship was

imposed on all news from Peshawar particularly on those about the Garhwal Rifles posted there[13] General Mohan Singh of the I N A fame once said that the two battalions of the Garhwalis joining the I N A were inspired by Chandra Singh's example[14] In a letter dated June 14 1930 from the G O C Eastern Command (Nainital) to the Chief of the General Staff, Army Headquarters, Simla it was stated that attempts were made to undermine the loyalty of the Garhwalis at Lansdowne and of the Kumaonis at Almora by Congressmen[15] After the incident of 1930, the spirit of Congress nationalism started affecting all these hill troops to an ever-increasing degree

NOTES

1 Rahul Sankrityayan *Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali* p 53
2 Chandra Singh Garhwali *Interview* February 9 1979
3 Rahul Sankrityayan *op cit* p 96
4 *Ibid* p 106
5 *Desh Bhumi Saptahik* November 15 1953
6 Chandra Singh Garhwali *Interview* February 9 1979
7 Rahul Sankrityayan *op cit* pp 126/28
8 Chandra Singh Garhwali *Interview* February 10 1979
9 *Ibid*
10 Kanhaiya Lal Misra *Uttar Pradesh Mein Swatantrata Sangram Ke Ek Jhanki* pp 79 80
11 D G Tendulkar *Abdul Gaffar Khan* p 70
12 *Ibid*
13 *March Towards Freedom* 1919-47 Exhibition organized by National Archives of India Feb 9 17th 1973 Panel No 9 display No 11
14 Rahul Sankrityayan *op cit* p 337
15 Home Department 1930, File No 174 Political/Secret National Archives

INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY AND THE ARMED STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

LAKSHMI SEHGAL

Before coming to the role of the I N A in the Armed Struggle for Independence, we must go back a little The I N A was not an isolated organisation that was formed without any previous thought and preparation. It is one link—almost the last in the chain of armed struggles that took place ever since the British set foot in the country The first major armed struggle was the War of Liberation in 1857 The true significance of the event was grossly underplayed by the British who tried to dismiss it as a small Sepoy Mutiny which was fanned by religious fanatics over the rumours that pig and cow fat was being used in the cartridges which the sepoy had to break open with his teeth thus committing sin Later, historians, British and Indian, have gone deep into the matter and brought out the vital facts that it was a genuine uprising of both Hindu and Muslim sepoys who were united in their efforts to overthrow, the British who were rapidly making in-roads into the country in the guise of merchants and traders Unfortunately, our historians and political scientists have not gone into the matter still deeper If they had, they would have found how completely integrated the two communities were and what steps the British later took to destroy that bond to sow the seeds of mutual distrust which persists till today In Uttar Pradesh, there are several small villages whose only landmark is an old gnarled peepul tree The villagers proudly point out to it and say that several of their ancestors had been hanged by the British from its branches for taking part in the uprising They live in abject poverty not knowing that they are the descendants of our first freedom fighters

The British, however, realised that they had nearly lost the country and hence came the proclamation of Queen Victoria and India became the brightest gem in the British Crown From

then on started the Master Slave relationship and the slaves themselves were divided by all possible means Education was provided mainly to produce clerks and subordinates to run the Government administration Rails and roads were built mainly for the quick transport of th armed forces from one part of the country to mother Recruitm nt to the armed forces were only for sepoys nd they were separated rigidly in watertight com partments by caste and creed This state however could not last There were frequent clashes mainly on the economic and agricultural front—uprising by the Indigo Plantation Workers the peasants against the Land Settlement Act etc Here the British found a loyal and willing ally in the zamindars and land lords who crushed the peasants mercilessly and kept them in perpetual serfdom

In spite of the hopelessly inadequate system of education there were avenues open to the sons of the rich Indians who were in the good books of the British to imbibe the liberal and scientific western education at home or even abroad These young people came to know about the French Revolution the American War of Independence and all other struggles It was but natural that they should become acutely conscious of their own position as subjects of Imperial Briton Then came World War I The armed forces had to be rapidly expanded and the same rigidity of selection could not be observed Not only soldiers but also doctors engineers and other professional men were drafted into the army A large number of Indian soldiers were sent overseas and thrown in the company of men of other races and culture There they learned that the lot of the common man was the same every where—the majority being dominated by a small minority Even during the World War I Indian re volutionaries like Raja Mahendra Pratap late Har Dayal and Maulvi Saheb who were in Germany tried to enlist German sup port for the liberation of India

At the end of World War I back home the tempo of politi cal activity was rising swiftly The thousands of demobilised soldiers who had been told that they were fighting to save demo cracy and for a better world found themselves unemployed The war-time boom in industry was also over However the most significant factor of the post World War I was the Russian Re

volution bringing hope to the exploited millions We, however did not have a Lenin but Mahatma Gandhi who arrived on the political scene He preached a new and novel philosophy A non violent revolution—a contradiction in term It was, however, an ideology which at that stage an unarmed subject nation could follow It spread throughout the country—not only among the educated in the towns but also into the village Unfortunately Gandhi was convinced that he could work within the old framework of caste and creed The result was that feudal and obscurantist ideas instead of being destroyed remained firmly entrenched and it became more in the nature of revival rather than a revolution The youth of India, especially of Bengal could not reconcile themselves to the creed of non violence Hence the rise of the revolutionary movement in Bengal and finally the Chittagong uprising In Kerala, the poor exploited Muslim peasant, the Moplah rose This was made out to be a purely communal struggle but it was the uprising of the oppressed peasant against his absentee landlord who happened to be a Hindu and who always had the support and protection of the British administration

Even in the Indian National Congress there was a group of young men led by Subhas Chandra Bose who was firmly of the opinion that a stage would be reached in the freedom struggle when arms would have to be used When he went to Europe in 1936 and later Subhas Chandra Bose was convinced that World War II would come within ten years and that we should utilise that moment to gain complete freedom He therefore made his contacts in all the European capitals and also made a detailed study of Military History Strategy etc At that time the Japanese had no place in his scheme of things History however decided otherwise By the time Subhas Chandra Bose reached Germany after his escape from India although he did organise a Free India Army from the Indian prisoners of war and Indian students he knew that there was no possibility of their reaching the Indian border

South East Asia however offered the golden opportunity The Imperial Japanese Army had overrun Malaya Sumatra Burma and was at the Indo-Burma border where they halted They now turned their attention towards Australia The Japanese

had captured 60 000 Indian Troops with all their equipment in tact They had not put them into Prisoners of War Camps but handed them over to Capt. Mohan Singh, the First Indian officer who surrendered to the Japanese and who was now working to raise the Indian National Army to liberate the Motherland Along with Capt., now Gen Mohan Singh was Shri Rash Behari Bose the veteran Indian revolutionary who had been living in Japan since 1915 as a fugitive from the British He was realising his life's ambition of organising the Indian Independence League throughout South East Asia, to liberate the motherland

The newly formed Indian National Army under Gen. Mohan Singh soon ran into trouble with the Japanese Gen Mohan Singh doubted the bona fides of the Japanese Their record in China was very much against them and they would not make any commitments regarding troop movements, transport and the actual campaign The Japanese on their side felt that Mohan Singh did not have any political or military status to be of real use to them Gen Mohan Singh resigned and wanted the I N A to be disbanded and sent to the Prisoner of War Camps Here Shri Rash Behari Bose stepped in He could not stop Mohan Singh, but neither was he willing to give up his life's ambition He took over the I N A with the help of a Directorate of Military Bureau and all officers and men were given the option to stay on or to follow Gen Mohan Singh The majority decided to stay on In the meantime definite proof had been received that Subhas Chandra Bose was in Germany Rash Behari Bose extended pressure on the Japanese Foreign Office and the Military Headquarters till he got an assurance that the Japanese would do everything in their power to bring Subhas Chandra Bose from Berlin to South East Asia This was also the time when the Allied Forces were gaining supremacy in the Air and on the Sea The German High Command offered their ablest E Boat Commander and Crew to transport Subhas Chandra Bose to the tip of Africa from where he could be transferred to a Japanese Sub-marine and to continue the precarious journey The escape of Subhas Chandra Bose from Calcutta across Asia to Europe to Berlin and then from Berlin to Tokyo is a saga to be preserved for all time

Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on the 3rd July

1943 having first visited Japan where he was received like the head of a free state On the 5th July at a very impressive and solemn function Shri Rash Behari Bose formally handed over the Presidentship of the Indian Independence League and the Supreme Command of the I N A to Subhas Chandra Bose Shri Rash Behari Bose was by that time a very sick man and his life's work, begun in 1911 when he took a shot at the Viceroy, had finally ended He passed away peacefully a few months later

From that date Subhas Chandra Bose was known to us as Netaji For him, there was no half measures He already had a trained army fully equipped and in battle readiness But that was not enough He asked for total mobilisation of every Indian, men, women and children from among the three lakh Indians in South East Asia and all their resources The I N A was to be an independent army supported by the Indians in the South East Asia The personality, dynamism and sincerity of the man was so great that he got what he wanted There was absolutely no coercion or force It was deemed an honour and a privilege to serve Netaji In the very first public meeting he addressed, he called for volunteers for a women regiment, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment There was a moment of silence followed by thunderous applause and thousands of women in the audience rushed to the dias offering to volunteer then and there When order has been restored Netaji told them that he was not asking for anything that was unknown to the women of India He reminded us of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi and the other valiant women who had opposed the British with arms and then he made special mention of the young girl revolutionaries of Bengal Shanti Suniti of Coomila Kalpana Datta and Pritilata Waddedar of Chittagong They were always in his mind and after that day I often heard him refer to them with admiration and pride He assured the audience that he respected Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of the Nation but there came a time in the life of a son, when he had to differ from his father on principle To him the time had come as he was firmly convinced that the final blow to the British occupation of India must come through an armed struggle The I N A was India's Army of

Liberation with the war cry—

JAI HIND—DELHI CHALO

From that moment feverish military preparations started Recruitment centres took in every able bodied young man who volunteered for the I N A and sent them off to training camps Officers Training Schools were started as with the expansion more officers were required The candidates were either experienced Jawan or civilian volunteer who had the qualities of leadership Troop movements from Malaya to Burma and there on to the front, started

The Rani of Jhansi Regiment was trained as an infantry regiment We were taught to handle Rifles Bayonets Light Machine Guns and Hand Grenades In addition we were given regular lectures in map reading, military tactics strategy etc Our day started at 6 A M and finished at 7 P M Twice a week in the beginning and often later we went on night march carrying our full equipment and even when we got back at 4 A M we were ready for the flag hoisting at 6 A M and the rest of the day's routine Our hands and feet became toughened and we could carry loads for long distance move silently at night and exist with very little food and sleep A nursing section was also started and the nurse served the I N A hospitals in Malaya and Burma Nurses also had to march with full kit and were given rifle training

The Rani of Jhansi Regiment moved from Singapore to Burma in early 1944 Here another batch was also being trained Our training was intensified and the first batch was sent to Myimo to be ready for the assault on Imphal

In the meantime the I N A was in action on two fronts One in the Arakan area and the other along the Imphal Road They had fought very well and had won the admiration of the Japanese They also sent back valuable information regarding the enemy Some of the boys trained in intelligence work had been dropped along the Indian Coast to infiltrate into the country Unfortunately most of them were caught and shot

The attack on Imphal was scheduled for the first week in May Unfortunately the monsoon started two weeks earlier than

usual and all the vehicular traffic got bogged down in the slush and mud Small jungle streams became rushing torrents and many of our soldiers were drowned In addition the Japanese had transferred all their air power to defend their home island We were therefore at the mercy of the Allied Bombers whenever the clouds parted and there was some visibility Imphal was reinforced in 24 hours by a Crack Division which halted our advance There was no other alternative than retreat Netaji however did not intend giving up the fight He wanted withdrawal and the reorganising of the force for the next stage An interesting fact is that Netaji had been trying hard to get the Japanese to allow the I N A to enter India through the Chittagong Hills It was not an area that could be well defended and he knew that if we could gain a foot hold there then the psychological impact would be tremendous first in Bengal and later throughout the country Netaji knew his countrymen and how he could arouse them To the hard pressed Japanese it seemed like a suicidal attempt so that idea could not be put into practice

Even though he had failed in leading the I N A on the Indian soil Netaji did not feel that he had completely failed He was sure that when the I N A soldiers were taken prisoner and then taken to India they would be able to inspire the Indian people to rise up and revolt It was with this spirit that the officers and men of the I N A fought on, even while confronted by numerically superior forces until they were forced to surrender Then the British tried all their tricks Separating officers from men Hindu from Muslim Civilian recruit from Old Indian army man and interrogating them in various ways Using all new psychological methods that had been introduced hoping to get them to condemn the I N A and Netaji and to say they had been forced to join But they failed completely It was the intelligent officers of British Army who first saw the writing on the wall They were convinced that once the I N A men reached India they would have the entire country behind them Forgetting the difference of caste and creed it would be nothing but

If the leadership could have handled a total revolution at that stage, that is exactly what would have happened Only in the process many of the old guards would have had to give way to the Young Blood The ageing Congress leaders saw success slipping from their hands, so while they apparently took up the I N A cause they were only biding their time for the Cabinet Mission and partition The I N A was left to fend for itself and the other wing of the Defence Services, the Indian Navy, which had also joined the Revolution was betrayed

I do not think any doubt remains today of the part played by the I N A under the leadership of Netaji, in the freedom struggle We are however not satisfied and feel that the blood of our revolutionary martyrs Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad and heroes of Chittagong Uprising the I N A and thousands of others has been shed in vain India is free only politically from British Imperialism Her toiling masses in the villages and the cities are living below the poverty line The revolution must go on till the masses are liberated from exploitation and every Indian lives a decent life

INQUILAB ZINDABAD

SOME REMINISCENCES OF THE INDO BURMAN RELATIONSHIP DURING WORLD WAR II

G S DHILLON

Burma and India jointly formed a part of the British Empire—so vast that the Sun never set on her! Till the mid Thirties Burma had been a province of the British India While this common heritage was responsible for creating a certain antagonism amongst Burmese towards Indians their common subjugation under a foreign tyrant was also the cause to inspire similar aspirations and urges amongst the peoples of both the countries to struggle for and achieve their respective independence The outbreak of the World War II gave an opportunity to the enslaved nations all the world over to organise themselves and fight for their liberation from Imperialistic strangle hold

When with the slogan Asia for the Asians the Japanese Armies surged forward sweeping the Americans the British and the Dutch from their holdings in the South West Pacific starting from Pearl Harbour and Singapore the Sun started setting daily on the British Empire Within less than a hundred days the Japanese Forces had burst into Burma That was the beginning of the end of the British Empire which collapsed within half a decade inspite of a decisive victory in the Great War

As is the wont of the people who have the misfortune of getting themselves their hearths and homes and their fields run over by opposing armies it is but natural that they side with the winner But in 1942 added to this human instinct of self preservation was the political prudence which impelled the Burmese people to help and co operate with the advancing Japanese forces to the extent of attacking the British and the British Indian Army who held their land They formed the Burma Independence Army (B I A) under the Thakin Party—a group of young nationalists under the leadership of U Aung San Their guerrillas harassed the British retreat all along and took a heavy toll of the British

and Indian lives They even fell on the refugees Indians and Burmese alike fleeing from Burma of whom more than 10 000 fell on the road to India under the Burmese dhaw ' axe

Three years later in 1945 the story was repeated again, but only in the reverse order

For three long years Burma had her Independent Government under Dr Ba Maw and the Golden Peacock fluttered proudly over the country Yet she was virtually occupied by the Japanese Forces This occupation during the War though of strategic and operational necessity was intolerable to the Burmese nationalists They felt their independence illusory and when the Japanese proved unable to hold the country against the British return, they turned against the Japanese

The Burmese Independence Army which had been trained by the Japanese left Rangoon in early March, 1945 under the Command of General Aung San with the object of holding the British advance around Prome They were about 7,000 strong Arriving at Prome they crossed the River Irrawaddy and declared themselves independent of the Burmese Government They declared war against Japan West of the Irrawaddy they established a strong base in the Thayetmeyo District and its adjoining areas from where they waged guerrilla warfare along the lines of communication practically all over the country especially from Rangoon to Toungoo and from Rangoon to Prome—the two most important highways Dressed as ordinary villagers they could not be recognised They annihilated small Japanese parties who happen to come their way and made it impossible for the Japanese to supply rations and ammunition to their frontline troops Here I dare to submit that the action of Gen Aung San and his followers significantly contributed to the hurried collapse of the Japanese resistance thereby accelerating the speed of the British advance as well as the gaining of independence for Burma

Looking back at the brief historical scenario described above, one is amazed as to how on earth could it be possible for the Indian National Army to operate and wage a War of Liberation from a land so hostile erstwhile? Here I also wish to gratefully record that we suffered not a loss of a single life at the Burmese hands during the days of our defeat and hundreds of miles of retreat This pleasant change miraculous as it was in the attitude

of the Burmese towards Indians was the result of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose—our leader's overwhelming personality and his policy of friendship and mutual respect towards the host country and her people He established most cordial relations with Dr Ba Maw and his Government from the very beginning He commanded as much respect from the peoples of the countries of the East as from the Indians living there Actually they looked upon him as their own and not as an Indian leader alone He was respected as a leader of the East

In the above setting I was fortunate to act a role assigned to me by Netaji which I will now describe briefly here—touching only the events relevant to the subject i e , Indo Burman relationship during the World War II

On 13th November 1944 I took over the Command of the 4th Guerrilla Regiment—the Nehru Brigade—as per Supreme Commander Netaji s orders At the time "The Nehru" was stationed at Myingyan—a district town and a river port situated at the confluence of the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy The units of the Brigade were deployed in that area with the object of defending it against enemy attack which appeared imminent consequent on our withdrawal from Imphal There were no other troops except 'the Nehru' in the Myingyan area—neither Japanese, nor Burmese nor the I N A (Indian National Army) I was an independent Commander within the operational jurisdiction of the Japanese 15th Army, who were responsible for the over all strategy and operations One of their officers of a field rank—Major Ogawa—with a small detachment of about one section strong formed a link between me and the Japanese Army Headquarters for the two way Liaison My relations with the Burmese Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police and their various district departments were direct and most cordial

One of the most important factors which helps a guerrilla is the goodwill of the people of the area he has to operate in No guerrilla can successfully operate in an area without the help of the local people whatever the resources at his disposal And the easiest way to achieve it is by respecting the women folk and the property of the local people This point was so much stressed by Netaji that in the operational area a Brigade Commander had powers vested in him to try summarily cases of desertion, looting and rape The penalty included death

Soon after resuming the Command it was brought to my notice by my Brigade Medical Officer that three days earlier there had been a case of rape near the village—Kuywa The case was investigated the culprit was recognised in an identification parade and was sentenced to death The punishment was announced in a public meeting arranged specially for the purpose I was surprised when the elderly people of the village and the adjoining habitations including the aggrieved party—the girl her husband and their parents who a meanwhile ago were so aggressive—came forward begging for mercy to save the offender s life Their appeal was overwhelming yet it was promptly rejected Later on when I gave a chance to the offending man if he would wish to appeal to Netaji against my award the man cried out Sir shoot me here rather than sending me to Netaji What face will I show him now AB MAIN NETAJI KO KIYA MOONH DIKHA OONGA?

Feeling that the purpose of the punishment had been served I secretly arranged for the man to be sent 16 miles away The rumour was spread that the man had been executed The result proved most favourable during our later days when we had to be in an area where water was scarce the Burmese would give it free of cost to us while at times they charged the Japanese up to five hundred rupees for a barrel of 200 litres When pressed much to accept the payment they would take a nominal price of five rupees a barrel only At times water had to be brought from the British held areas and from a long distance

Our doctors were permitted to treat their sick whenever possible The district officers and their families paid a visit once a month to our hospital bringing flowers fruits and sweets for our patients The soldier in illness and away from home is extraordinarily an emotional being Visits by children and members of the fair sex makes him feel as if his own mother sister or daughter had come—his loneliness changes into feelings of gratefulness which inspire him to be a good soldier and better man He thinks life to be worth living as well as sacrificing

When the time came for us to move out of Myingyan to go to Nyaungu and Pagan to oppose the Southern Crossing of the Irrawaddy by General Slim's 14th Army the send off the people of the area gave us was most touching The elderly Deputy Commissioner treated me as if he were sending his own son to the

battle He gave me names of persons whom I should contact in time of need He told me that he had already sent messages to various places to help me He advised me to be very careful and not hasty It was from him and from another Burmese friend that I got a hint that the Burmese Army were going to turn anti-Japanese General Aung San had by then realised that the good of the Burmese and of the Japanese were incompatible I was advised to be watchful and take things a bit easy Burdened with the problems of the impending battle, I wonder if at the time I could really appreciate the significance of the information handed down to me with the feelings of concern for us and our cause I felt worried and depressed It was after the Battle of Magwe that I came face to face with the situation against which the Deputy Commissioner had cautioned me

From Myingyan to Magwe i e , from the end of January to the beginning of May 1945 The Nehru was continuously in the battle zone The Burmans helped us not only with shelter and supplies of food and water but also provided us with information about the enemy dispositions which enabled us to wage guerrilla warfare though encircled by the enemy on all sides After the Pagan we could hide for about three weeks in the ravines hardly four miles away from Pyinbin—a road function and a water point strongly held by the British The Burmese villagers used to fetch water for us from that very place We used to hide ourselves during the day and attack the British at night But for the Burmese active and sincere support the British could have bombed or shelled us out of existence within a day or even within a few hours The Burmese behaved as if we were co nationals fighting for a common cause

After the Battle of Magwe we were forced to cross over to the west of the Irrawaddy Our plan was to withdraw to Prome Here we found that Gen Aung San's Army was in actual control of the area They had adopted a new name People's National Army with the object of fighting against the Fascist Powers They had established an effective parallel Government comprising of about 50 villages west of Prome with their Headquarters at Thayetmayo They lived in villages dressed as ordinary farmers Their control in the area was absolute Without their permission it was not possible to purchase any item of supplies or rations, nor hire bullock carts which was the only form of transport available in

those areas The villages under their control were well organised against an attack Each village had a special type of drum—a hollowed tree trunk which when beaten carried its sound a long way Sentries guarded each village round the clock On the warning of an approaching enemy the village would be completely vacated and all men women and children would disappear into jungles where they had stored away their corn and rice Even the cattle and the poultry were so efficiently dispersed and hidden that not a bird could be found in the village or in its vicinity

As we had never clashed against the Burmese Army, General Aung San was well disposed towards the Indian National Army —after all we were fighting for our respective liberation We found little difficulty in the area through which we were obliged to retreat

Then a snag arose We had five Japanese personnel with us whom we were asked to surrender The Japanese were mostly our liaison personnel When we arrived at a village called Minde, approximately ten miles North West of Kama the Burmese captured nine of our men as hostages and threatened to kill them if the five Japanese were not handed over to them General Shah Nawaz Khan our Divisional Commander who had refused to attack the Burmese guerrillas at the behest of the Japanese before the Battle of Magwe on the plea that our fight was only for the liberation of India and not against the Burmese was hard put to it to save the five Japanese at the risk of losing nine Indian lives as well as the Burmese good will He held a conference of the staff officers of his Division and of my Brigade That was the one and the only occasion when the supply of rations was denied to us

General Shah Nawaz Khan decided and we all agreed with him that come what may the five Japanese soldiers who were our allies, would not be handed over to the Burmese Army A letter was drafted addressed to Gen Aung San in a polite and diplomatic language yet firmly refusing to surrender the five Japanese That day we could not purchase rations nor could we hire bullock-carts to carry our weak and wounded cases We spent the night on empty stomach Our letter had not been replied There was suspense all around It was a nightmarish night There lurked the fear of Japanese being forcibly taken or attacked in the dark Senior officers were put along sentries to guard against all even-

tualities The Japanese were hidden amongst the Indians Shah Nawaz and I could hardly sleep However, the night passed peacefully

The next morning the Burmese relented a bit Gen Aung San s reply was received allowing us to keep the Japanese but to surrender their personal arms But we refused to give in Another letter was drafted in which it was argued that surrendering of arms boils down to surrendering the soldiers to which we could not agree

I wish the letter could be preserved It was a piece of diplomatic sagacity and grace which ended with an appeal to the spirit of soldier s code of honour and the future good neighbourly relationship between the two independent countries when neither the British nor the Japanese would be there We owed it to the future generations of Burmans and Indians to so conduct ourselves that it may be worthy of being emulated

The outcome was a happy one By the evening our nine men were released We were allowed to purchase rations The Japanese were allowed to stay under our protection and keep their arms It had been further suggested that a meeting be arranged between our Divisional Commander and Gen Aung San to plan our future courses of action I opposed Gen Shah Nawaz Khan's going on such a mission Gen Shah Nawaz's life was too important to be risked I offered myself for the job This was agreed upon

The following day I started with a Burmese soldier dressed as an ordinary villager to guide me to their Headquarters I was allowed to take only one man with me with a weapon either on him or on me A weapon each on us two Indians was not permitted It suited me for I did not use to carry a weapon even otherwise but on that day it was with strange feelings that at 10 A M , I proceeded unarmed to meet a representative of Gen Aung San at an unknown place It was a small village which we reached by 5 P M The village abounded with life and activity Hundreds of young men and women were practicing weapon training Even girls were doing bayonet fighting with an extraordinary zeal They all appeared to be healthy and bright young folks The sight was pleasing and inspiring

I was received by a young Burmese officer—Major Madan He was nice and courteous We were offered water followed by

a cup of tea and without any loss of time we started the work for which I had come 16 miles away Major Madan explained that to avoid discussion he had prepared a questionnaire which he placed before me There were 11 questions in all which were to be replied with yes or no Those were very simple and direct questions Something like Are you Burmese friend? Are you the friend of the Japanese? Are you the friend of the British? Are you prepared to fight against the Japanese? etc etc

It took me little time to answer the paper As the Major saw it he remarked So we are in the opposing camps The conversation that followed was something like under

I	Unfortunately it is so
Madan	Do you appreciate that your presence as such in the area of our control is bound to create misunderstanding between us and our Allies—the British?
I	I do appreciate
Madan	Gen Aung San also appreciates your that is the Indian National Army's position
I	We are grateful for that
Madan	How would you like that we leave each other alone by your going out of our area so that we are not obliged to act against you?
I	Suits us As it is our plan is to withdraw to Prome on the way to Rangoon
Madan	Then we are prepared to arrange for your recrossing the Irrawaddy by providing you boats and as much rations as your men can carry
I	Thank you very much It suits us Please convey our regards to Gen Aung San and thank you
Madan	Please pay my regards to your Divisional Commander and thank him for this meeting
I	Yes I will thank you very much Now may I go back?
Madan	Not before having your meals with me
I	Thanks a lot but let it be a quick one as I have a long way to go
Madan	It is all ready we shan't be late

I had my worries which I could not share with Major Madan Before sending me on this mission Gen Shah Nawaz Khan had told me to return latest by midnight Any delay after that would be mistaken by him that there had been foul play He had told me with all seriousness that if I did not return by midnight he would put the village to flames along with all the inhabitants And I knew Gen Shah Nawaz Khan meant each word of his warning to me if I were not back by midnight

It was a lavish dinner I can still relish its taste even after a gap of 36 years Major Madan saw me off a little distance away out of the village We thanked each other and said good bye

On the return journey to Kama I had to make it running at the double to be in time I feared the consequences of my late arrival Gen Shah Nawaz was not a man to give empty threats The village with thousands of its people would be burnt down by him if I could not reach him by midnight I feared I could not make it in time when I heard a horse approaching It had been sent by Shah Nawaz Khan for me I mounted it immediately and inspite of darkness galloped to the village Shah Nawaz had come out on the road to wait for my arrival He had a bundle of dry grass and a match box with him As I got down from the horse to salute him he fell down on his knees with stretched hands towards the heaven and offered thanks to the Almighty God saying "Oh! God thank you for saving me from committing a sin and for saving innocent lives' As he stood after the thanks giving his eyes were filled with tears

He told me to make straight for the river bank where our men had already started the crossing along with the five Japanese On the way I reported my doings of the day General Shah Nawaz Khan listened to my report and as we boarded the last boat waiting for us with a sigh of relief he said 'All praise be to Almighty God for His blessings and mercies"

Long 'ive the Indo-Burman goodwill'

THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY AND INDIA'S FREEDOM

SISIR K BOSE

It is most appropriate that on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Great Chittagong Uprising of 1930 we should seek to re examine and re-assess the historic role of the Indian National Army in the attainment of India's freedom In this context it should be our endeavour to establish a historical continuity of events during the last twentyfive years of India's struggle for freedom This is essential for properly understanding the present and correctly visualising the future

In order to place the role of the Indian National Army in the proper historical setting it is necessary to study and analyse the evolution of the political ideas of its architect Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Subhas Chandra Bose based his political judgment and notions on a panoramic view of history and an analysis of the flow of historical events of this subcontinent in the last five thousand years[1] Among the general conclusions he arrived at on such study and analysis were first, that every *new* epoch in our history had been heralded by people possessing greater intellectual power and superior military skill, second, national decline from time to time had been due to physical and intellectual fatigue, third, the British constituted the only foreign element in the entire history of India who failed to be absorbed into the Indian social framework and thus for the first time since the dawn of civilization the Indian people felt that they had been conquered in every sense of the term fourth, any forward movement in India during the past two centuries was organically connected with upheavals in other parts of the world

Netaji came to the firm conclusion on the basis of this understanding that there was no community of interest whatsoever between the British Empire and resurgent Indian Nationalism—historically, politically, economically culturally or otherwise Therefore no conciliation or compromise between the two forces

was possible Further, if by any chance or for purposes of convenience, a compromise was affected, the result would not be of lasting value It followed from this that Indian nationalists or national revolutionaries must have to plan their struggle on the principle of no-compromise and a final direct confrontation with the British Empire

The writer, then a mere school boy, can recall listening to—or rather eavesdropping from adjoining rooms on discussions between the brothers Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose late in the night at their home at 1 Woodburn Park, Calcutta in the early thirties on plans for the final capture of power I can distinctly remember their underlining the need of a final armed assault on the British power in India at an opportune time That was the time following the Chittagong Uprising and the heroic exploits of young Bengal revolutionaries in different parts of the province Both the brothers were deeply stirred by the total dedication sacrifice and patriotism of our young revolutionaries I have heard my father Sarat Chandra Bose repeatedly refer to this 'death-defying band as made of sterling gold' I got the clear impression that my father was particularly concerned—and I have reasons to believe Netaji shared his concern—with the fate of these men and was of the opinion that such precious material should be saved and preserved for the final battle that was yet to come Two instances can be cited in this regard which have a direct bearing on the present celebrations first his proposal that Benoy Krishna Bose the leader of a number of daring actions against tyrannical British officials should be sent out of India and preserved and his offer of necessary financial support for the escape,[3] second his proposal to Chittagong prisoners in the course of his interview with them as defence counsel to break out of jail This found concrete expression in a packet of presents he managed to pass on to Surya Kumar Sen containing four hand-grenades and a sum of money to enable him to organise a jail break and escape to freedom[4]

Netaji gave out his ideological and programmatic ideas in a frank and forthright manner in his presidential address to the Third Indian Political Conference held in London in 1933 He compared the position of the British Government in India in relation to the Indian National Congress to a well armed and well equipped fortress He was of the opinion that for the next

and final stage either or both of the following steps had to be taken, first, a complete economic blockade of the fortress which would compel submission of the British, second, an attempt to *capture the fortress by force of arms* He went on to define the reasons which were responsible for the failure of the economic blockade attempted in a general way by the Congress The reasons were first, all external communications of the country were controlled by the British, second, internal communications were also not controlled by the Congress, and lastly, the machinery of collecting revenue by the alien power remained largely undisturbed, regardless of the series of campaigns of civil disobedience and non violent non cooperation For the success of economic blockade, he emphasised it was essential to organise complete stoppage of collection of taxes and revenue mobilisation of the working class and peasantry on our side to paralyse the government and winning the support of government personnel by means of propaganda He ruled out seizure of power at that time by force of arms on the ground that the Congress was pledged to non-violence It will be clear to any observer that he was not in a position, nor was the time opportune, to openly advocate from a forum in the capital of the British Empire, seizure of power by force of arms Nevertheless Netaji particularly wanted to draw attention to the fact that regardless of our campaign, the army, the police the civil administration were quite loyal to the British Government He went on to say that there had been unprecedented awakening of the Indian people, the whole country was yearning for freedom, the people were prepared for sacrifice and suffering in the cause of freedom British prestige had reached its lowest ebb, the moral basis of British rule had been demolished and there was considerable moral support from the world at large, the British were able to hold India simply by the sword The implication of this thesis should be clear

Netaji completed the first part of his book *The Indian Struggle* in Europe at the end of 1934 He conceded therein that the British Government would succeed in temporarily weakening the nationalist forces by promulgating the Government of India Act of 1935 and principally by placating the minorities It would take he said the people of India some years to get disillusioned He was however confident that there would eventually be another upheaval adding that 'what exact form this upheaval will take

it s difficult to determine at this stage ' He wrote the second part of the book in Berlin in 1942 by which time his predicted upheaval had already arrived In the first chapter of this part of the book he was absolutely forthright about what he thought was coming He wrote The younger generation in India has however learnt from the last twenty years experience that while passive resistance can hold up or paralyse a foreign administration—it cannot overthrow or expel it without the use of physical force The last stage will come when active resistance will develop into an armed revolution Then will come the end of the British rule in India By active resistance he was referring to the new pattern of struggle exhibited during the 1942 August movement Its development into an armed revolution was clearly the task of the Indian National Army which was then in the process of organisation both in Europe and in East Asia

At this point I desire to submit my view point on the question of revolutionary violence and the Indian nationalist movement It has been repeated from many platforms since independence and particularly since we started observing anniversaries of our revolutionary martyrs of the thirties that there had been two streams in our national movement one non violent and the other violent According to the protagonists of either method both of these two streams has contributed in greater or lesser measures to the achievement of India s independence I submit that such a contention is not merely an over simplification of a very complex historical process but is basically unhistorical and wrong In this connection I wish to make some observations on the evolution and role of revolutionary violence—which the British called the terrorist movement—in the course of our national struggle *since the beginning of this century I think it is logical to study* revolutionary violence in India in two phases first, that preceding the Gandhi era that is to say up to 1920 and the other after the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the undisputed leader of our national movement In the pre Gandhi period revolutionary violence was in the nature of isolated explosions or outbursts with the purpose of providing what we may call shock treatment to a subject people as well as to the ruling power without any organic link with the vet rather unformed national movement which was till then by and large a constitutional movement or argument and rhetoric of the elite After Gandhiji had through his new

method of *satyagraha* transformed the movement into one of the masses and given it a truly national dimension, protagonists of revolutionary violence not only became a part of the national mainstream but many of them held positions in the National Congress organisation. Since then, I submit, there has been one stream not two, with the same motivation and the same goal, although admittedly composed of various components with qualitative variations in methods of struggle, not working at cross purposes but actually fulfilling each other. I am saying this without going into the purely theoretical, ethical or philosophic considerations relating to the definition of violence or non-violence or whether they apply at all to a people engaged in a life and death struggle for independence.[8] I plead that our national struggle for *freedom be studied and understood in totality, and not split up* into segments, admitting of course a process of dialectics in pushing the movement of a people as large as in India to higher and higher stages. In this light, the so called 'violent' aspects of the movement were as much part of the national mainstream as any other.

Let us now return to the peak period of Netaji's political career in India which began with his election as President of the National Congress in 1938. A reexamination of the mammoth address he delivered at Haripura will convince anybody that he was at this time ready with his complete political ideology, programme and plan of action.[9] Even before he formally took over as President, he had clearly set down the two fold objective before us namely to convert the Congress into the broadest possible anti imperialist front for the final battle for freedom and then, after power was won, to establish a socialist regime.[10] But then his formulations were not orthodox or conformist by any means. Let us therefore point out certain distinctive features in the light of the steps he took during World War II resulting in the formation of the I N A. First he pointed out how the British Empire was at that time suffering from strains at a number of points and that it could not withstand a united onslaught from our side. second he made it clear that by *satyagraha* he understood non-violent non cooperation in the widest sense of the term *including civil disobedience*. He added in this regard 'it would not be correct to call our method passive resistance. Satyagraha as I understand is not merely passive resistance but active resistance as well.' Third, he sought to

dispel infantile or at best juvenile thinking with regard to foreign policy He said categorically we should not be influenced by the internal politics of any country or the form of its state We shall find in every country men and women who will sympathise with Indian freedom, no matter what their own political views may be Fourth, to propagate the cause of Indian freedom effectively he wanted the Indian National Congress to have its trusted representatives in every part of the globe and he added even Central and South America in addition to Europe, Asia, Africa and North America In his concluding appeal to the party men regardless of internal differences, he wanted them to stand foursquare against all the stress that may beset our path' and make the Congress the one supreme organ of mass struggle He particularly appealed to the leftist groups in the Congress to pool their resources for 'democratising the Congress and reorganising it on the broadest anti imperialist basis' [11] It is clear from his utterances and writings just prior to and following the Haripura Congress and till the fateful session of the All India Congress Committee in Calcutta in April 1939, when he resigned as president, that he was proceeding on the basis of a broad national anti imperialist front for the purpose of the final struggle I should emphasize here that the unity that he was working for was unity of action and not unity of inaction and the only condition that he made for such unity was that all concerned would proceed resolutely in the direction of a major and final assault on British Imperialism

By the time Netaji took over as Congress President the Congress had already been working the provincial part of the new constitution in the majority of Indian provinces and the British Government was preparing to force the federal part down our throats As President Netaji saw and sensed a two fold danger from within our own ranks,—first the growth of a neo constitutionalist mentality resulting from office acceptance and a lurking desire among the Right Wing to work out a compromise on the issue of Federation On the other hand, the Munich Pact in September 1939, convinced him of an impending war in Europe He started an open propaganda for preparing the country for a national struggle synchronising with the coming war in Europe It should be pointed out here that he was the only one among the front-rank national leaders who was talking in terms of taking

advantage of an international war crisis and launching direct action for immediate independence. Thus already towards the end of 1938 the breach between him and the orthodox Congress leadership including Mahatma Gandhi was wide. His contesting the presidentship for the second term and winning it against Gandhiji's wishes was the proverbial last straw. His call at Tripuri for an ultimatum to the British Government of six months and following it up with direct action if need be was for all practical purposes a cry in the wilderness. A careful scrutiny of the Gandhi-Bose correspondence of March to May 1939 shows that Gandhiji and his followers were determined to part company with him. Efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru to somehow bridge the gap proved ineffective.[1]

Now a question may be asked here and debated if it would not have been right and logical and also patriotic for Netaji to have forced a split in the Congress and taken over the party as its duly elected President by declaring the Pant resolution ultra vires of the Congress constitution. There are examples in our history and that of other countries that progress has been promoted rather than hindered by splits where a clear antithesis to the old order has arisen. But this is one of the crucial ifs of history to which a clear answer may only be hypothetical.

It is well known that after his exit from the Congress Netaji sought to bring together parties and groups in the Congress who claimed to be leftist on the platform of the Forward Bloc. The effort was not successful so that the alternative of a Left Consolidation Committee was brought into being. It is also well known how the LCC disintegrated bit by bit on account of differences in policy and tactics among its constituents. It is interesting that this experiment has been attempted in our contemporary history more than once since 1939 but so far without success. Here it may be worthwhile to recall how Netaji defined leftism in simple terms. He said in his Kabul thesis of 1941: "In the present political phase of Indian life leftism means anti-imperialism. A genuine anti-imperialist is one who believes in undiluted independence as the political objective and in uncompromising national struggle as the means for attaining it. After the attainment of political independence leftism will mean Socialism and the task of the people will then be the reconstruction of national life on a socialist basis."[1] The crux of the matter lies in not merely pro

lessing leftism but practising it Practising uncompromising anti imperialism in a war crisis with single minded determination demands of an individual or a party such political honesty and courage that is rare in history It is therefore not surprising that most of the parties and groups carrying leftist banners failed, according to Netaji's definition of leftism to play a leftist role either prior to or during World War II What happened between 1943 and 1947 we shall discuss later

How what was the state of India that Subhas Chandra Bose surveyed in 1939-40 and what were the options before him? Mahatma Gandhi had clearly ruled out a mass struggle on the part of the Congress The leftist platform that he himself had sought to build as the instrument of struggle failed to emerge as a cohesive force on account of doctrinaire hair splitting The other parties like the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha were more interested in promoting their sectarian aims rather than rise to the occasion The Forward Bloc provided the only platform for its leader to preach its message But, though the Forward Bloc had considerable mass support principally on account of the leader's disciplined cadres it was barely a year old when the leader was clapped in prison That brings us to the middle of 1940

Netaji's last imprisonment at the Presidency Jail, Calcutta, from July to December 1941 was the time when he took the final and irrevocable decision to take upon himself the task of going abroad secretly to organise an armed thrust from outside to spark off armed uprising in the country resulting in the end of British rule in India But it should be pointed out that there is now evidence that he had this idea actively in mind since the early part of 1939 Soon after the Tripuri Congress he thought in terms of going over to China with a regular passport and apparently on a fraternal visit But the response of the Chinese Government following upon a private discussion he had with the then Chinese Consul General in Calcutta was not up to his expectations and then the Government of India refused to issue him a passport on grounds set out in secret exchanges which are now available [14] It is also on record that he had sent a secret communication to the Soviet Government through its Ambassador in London towards the end of the year seeking the assistance of the Soviets in promoting an armed uprising in India [15] The response of the Soviet Government to this approach and several others he made sub-

sequently has to our knowledge so far been nil.[8] Bhagat Ram Talwar who escorted him across the North West frontier in 1941, has recorded that he was contacted for the purpose of Netaji's escape in May 1940 but the plan had to be given up because of the latter's arrest in connection with the Holwell Monument agitation.[9] The writer can recall an interesting fact that he heard from his mother in September 1940. She told him that Netaji had been pressing my father during his interviews with him in jail to get in touch with Mian Akbar Shah of N.W.F.P. and ask the latter to proceed to the Soviet Union. Mian Akbar Shah was the man who was eventually introduced to the writer by Netaji himself in December in connection with arrangements for his escape.[10] Thus thoughts and plans about getting out of India and functioning as a free man in national interest in friendly foreign territory during the war crisis and thereafter had been in Netaji's mind for at least two years before the actual event.

Now let us see how far Netaji had gone in his own mind about what he actually wanted to accomplish abroad and how he proposed to carry it out. A most revealing document is the secret report of the Italian Minister Quaroni in Kabul of April 1941. The report drafted soon after Quaroni's discussion with Netaji during the latter's dangerous sojourn in Kabul shows that Netaji was already talking in terms of a Government of Free India and of working up an armed insurrection in India with the assistance of powers fighting Britain. What if anything passed between Netaji and the Soviet Government during his transit through Moscow is still a closed book. All that we know from German archival sources is that the Soviet Government eventually agreed to allow him to travel through Soviet territory to Germany with an Italian diplomatic passport, evidently at the intercession of German and Italian Governments, even though the response of Soviet representatives in Kabul to direct approaches from Bhagat Ram Talwar on Netaji's behalf was persistently negative.

In about a week after his arrival in Berlin in April 1941 Netaji sent a secret memorandum to the German Foreign Office.[20] The

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[8] The Soviet Union, it must be noted, does not engineer or promote any uprising in other countries because it firmly sticks to the Marxist-Leninist principle that revolutions cannot be exported but are made by the masses of the country concerned.—Editorial Board

memorandum is a most carefully drawn up and exhaustive diplomatic document seeking to educate the German Foreign Office on the need to assist Indian nationalists in their own interest of defeating the British Empire with details of the Indian situation and describing in detail the actual operational possibilities in the pursuit of the common aim It is not widely known that my father Sarat Chandra Bose was in contact with Netaji in Berlin in 1941 via Tokyo through the courtesies of the then Consul General of Japan in Calcutta The writer can recall his father telling him that Netaji was hard put to it to educate Ribbentrop and his staff in Asian affairs It is evident that it took rather long for the German Foreign Office to respond to Netaji positively and on his terms

In regard to Netaji s discussion with foreign powers whether in Europe or in Asia one basic point must never be lost sight of One academic jurist speaking on Netaji once said that the difference between most of the other national leaders and Subhas Chandra Bose was that while the others fulfilled the role of His Majesty s Opposition Netaji fulfilled the role of His Majesty s opponent Thus in relation to other powers and states Netaji projected himself as the spokesman of Free India in the making a clear alternative to British rule which was on the way out It has even been said that for some time in Germany he was verily a one man State His negotiations with world powers like Germany Japan and Italy or others were invariably in principle as well as in practice State to State exchanges even though he had not organised and proclaimed a Provisional Government in Europe In Berlin he gradually gathered round him a band of Indians of all ages and vocations under the banner of Free India Centre (Zentrale Freies Indien) It is of interest that this group consisted of people with different political inclinations also and not all of them were in the good books of the then German Government They came together under Netaji s leadership because of their absolute confidence that the interest and honour of Free India were safe in his keeping

Once the German Government made up their mind to accord in Netaji the status of the accredited representative of Free India they gave him all the privileges flowing from such recognition It has been said that some of the small states of Eastern Europe then in the German orbit were quite envious of the concessions and facilities enjoyed by Netaji and the Free India Centre Netaji

gave to the Free India Centre the form of a miniature India working through a chain of departments in all fields of national life The immediate task was of course the liberation war Priority was naturally give to the raising of an armed force and an international campaign for India s freedom In organising the armed force which came to be known as the Indian Region Netaji was not merely thinking in terms of recruiting volunteers from among the British Indian prisoners of war in German and Italian hands but also of training a new and fresh cadre of officers from among young Indian civilians and students then in Europe It should be emphasised that the process was entirely voluntary It was a question of politicization of the unmitrated and ideological conversion of Indian mercenaries in the British camp This was true of the relatively limited field in Europe and the wider field in East Asia Apart from the task of organising the nucleus of the future Indian National Army and a powerful campaign over the radio beaming particularly to India there were people at the Free India Centre engaged in national planning in every possible field under Netaji s direct guidance *Azad Hind* the official journal of the Centre published simultaneously in German and English carried articles on Indian politics economics history cultural affairs and so on It was in Germany that Jana Gana Mana was formally and officially played as the national anthem before an international assembly Jai Hind was coined as the national salutation and the appellation of Netaji chosen for the leader of the national revolution German military texts were translated into Urdu Postage stamps were printed for Free India

In the world situation prevailing in 1940 41 it was entirely logical for Netaji to choose Germany as his field of operations for the final battle He had planned to mount an attack on British India from the historically traditional direction—the North West Tribal territories outside British tutelage between the British Indian frontier and Afghanistan were to serve as the springboard of the attack Most of these were hostile to the British and recently evidence was being unearthed which show that they were quite responsive to Netaji s plans Netaji s memorandum to the German Government already referred to indicated that in establishing a channel of communication between Europe and Afghanistan and India indirect help from the Soviet Union and/or Turkey would be necessary Such indirect help from the Soviet

Union was extremely useful during Netaji s secret journey from Afghanistan to Germany But all this was based on the presumption that status quo between Germany and the Soviet Union as stipulated in the German Soviet Non Aggression Pact of August 1939 would continue for some time more

But then the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 upset Netaji s plans He lost no time in informing the German Foreign Office of his own adverse reaction and that of his countrymen to this new development On the other hand Japan s declaration of war on Britain and America in December 1941 threw up a new and welcome possibility for India s national revolutionaries Even before a formal invitation was sent to him by the Indian Independence League in East Asia after its conference in Bangkok in June 1942 to come over to the East, Netaji had been planning to do so on his own There is a letter on record that he wrote to the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in May 1942 asking for facilities to travel to the East – Later in the same month the one and only Bose Hitler interview took place The record of the interview shows that Hitler conceded that in the circumstances prevailing at the time Germany could not do much for India and he actually advised Netaji to go over to the East and seek the assistance of Japan in his efforts to free India Hitler also offered to place a German submarine at his disposal In this connection the writer had the occasion to speak to Paul Schmidt Hitler s official interpreter in Munich in 1939 I asked Schmidt about the impression that Netaji made on his German counterparts Schmidt said that he could not remember the details of the conversation but he remembered that they saw in Bose the image of India—India of the past, the present and the future

Since the day Singapore fell that is the 15th February 1942 to late January 1943 when his travel plans to the East were finalised Netaji had the most restless time in Europe almost similar to his fortyfive days in Kabul on his way out of India He was pinning to come to the East and put into effect the plans he had made for the final struggle for freedom During the ninety day journey from Kiel to Sabang in the submarine he did not have even a day s rest He was working continuously and planning out in detail all that lay ahead of him in Japan and East Asia For instance he even dictated the address that he would give to the

Rani of Jhansi Regiment deliberated on the outfit of India's women warriors, etc etc He coolly planned on the one hand his coming encounter with the leaders of Japan and on the other, sorted out in his mind the problems of the principal task that awaited him namely to force out of the amorphous and heterogeneous mass of Indians in East Asia a united, disciplined and militant organisation with the I N A as its core to give battle to Britain

A full month after his arrival in Japan Netaji spent in preparatory work for the summit meeting with Premier Tojo of Japan He met leading personalities of all branches of Japan's armed forces, leading political and diplomatic personnel intellectuals and *public men of standing and visited industries, farms schools and* all kinds of public enterprises It had been said that at their first meeting the magic of Bose' worked on Tojo and made him concede most of Netaji's demands It is indeed true that Netaji's personality worked wonders not only with Tojo but with many national leaders of Europe and Asia But the fact remains that careful and diligent preparation is necessary in diplomatic manoeuvres for the success of the final meeting at the summit Following their two meetings Tojo invited Netaji to the Japanese Parliament where, in his presence the Premier of a foreign country made an official declaration —for the first and only occasion during World War II—affirming full and unqualified support to the cause of Indian independence

Having won the first round, Netaji disclosed his presence in Japan to the world and sent out a stirring appeal to his countrymen all over East Asia for active support in the coming campaign His arrival in Singapore on the 3rd July 1943 marked the beginning of the last glorious chapter in India's struggle for independence Owing to inadequate leadership and inexperience in international affairs the Indian independence movement was then in disarray The Indian National Army founded by Mohan Singh, was for all practical purposes in suspended animation In a magnificent and statesman like gesture Rash Behari Bose handed over the leadership of the entire movement to Subhas Chandra Bose What followed was an epic and a saga of an entire emergent nation—men and women young and old the soldier the labourer, the peasant the businessman the professional and all—merging their identity with the mother nation and throwing all its

resources for its liberation It is for the historian to find a parallel to this phenomenon in history

Netaji spoke in clear and forthright terms and direct to the hearts and minds of men He expressed in simple terms the sum total of his revolutionary experience He told them that in the battle for India's freedom two things were lacking—an Army of Liberation and a Provisional Government under whose auspices the army could go into battle To carry the struggle on to successful consummation what was needed was total mobilisation of all available resources in men money and material for the cause Under his leadership a sizeable and inspired army came into existence and went into battle under the banner of the Azad Hind Provisional Government Indians in East Asia responded to his call for Total Mobilisation in a manner unknown in India's history of struggle since 1857 The Japanese military command yielded to his demand to open a front on India's eastern border and assign important sectors to the Indian National Army Fighting side by side with the Japanese armed forces the Indian National Army crossed the Indian frontier on the 18th March 1944 and planted the national tricolour on Indian soil for the first time in two hundred years British imperialists won the battle but lost the war of Indian independence to India's national revolutionaries and the Indian National Army

Netaji had told the German Government in his memorandum of April 1941 that eventually it would not be possible for the British Government to rule India with the help of the Indian soldiers who form the bulk of the British Indian Army The Indian National Army knocked out this determining element of the British Raj in India

Now on the basis of the above narration and analysis the following picture emerges of the final phase of the Indian National Movement from 1939 to 1947 the period of the great upheaval of World War II and its aftermath 1) The reluctance and refusal of India's national leadership to adopt a bold and straightforward policy of confronting the British Government with the demand for independence and fight for it if necessary 2) the failure of the radical and so called leftist forces to unite on a programme of struggle against the alien power 3) Netaji's escape from India and gradual stiffening of Mahatma Gandhi's attitude toward the Bri-

tish symbolised in individual civil disobedience movement of 1940 41, 4) sharpening of the demand for Pakistan by the Muslim League resulting in a weakening of national unity vis-a vis the British, 5) further advance of Mahatma Gandhi along the path of struggle culminating in the August Resolution in 1942, 6) organisation of the I N A in Europe and in East Asia in 1942 43 by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the armed battle waged by the I N A on India s borders, 7) formal defeat of the August Revolution and the I N A, 8) complete demoralisation of nationalist forces inside India at the end of the war, 9) victorious entry of the defeated I N A into India and arrival of the message of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, 10) unprecedented mass upsurge in the wake of the return of the I N A and uprising in the Indian Navy and Air Force and a nationalist stir among the Indian officers and men of the British Indian Army, 11) failure of India's national leadership or the I N A or the so-called left parties to seize the opportunity and capture power, 12) Successful British counter-manoeuvres neutralising the nationalist upsurge and moves for a negotiated settlement, 13) Unparalleled Hindu-Muslim riots tearing apart India's national fabric, 14) Attainment of independence on the basis of partition and dominion status

An objective study of the milestones of the final phase of our national struggle for freedom as detailed above justifies the following conclusions

The mainstream of our national movement was in a state of stagnation and disarray from 1939 to 1941 National unity was at discount Netaji's journey abroad broke the stalemate in 1941 Mahatma Gandhi advanced step by step towards the path of struggle until in August 1942 all genuine patriotic forces merged in the August rising That rising constituted a synthesis and intermingling of non violent and national revolutionary forces when the Indian masses went over to active resistance and offensive warfare casting aside passive resistance Gandhiji's 'Quit India' and 'Do or Die were fundamentally not different from Netaji s 'Liberty or Death' The August uprising was crushed but the fight was taken up by the Indian National Army What the Indian people could not achieve inside India was done by their compatriots in Europe and East Asia The Indian people found their national identity and national unity in the Indian National Army which

fought the last war of Indian independence This war was the sumtotal of India s effort of half a century and a shining example of a synthesis of all currents of our national revolution There is something more By destroying the basis of the British Indian Army, the principal instrument of colonial subjugation in our part of the world, the Indian National Army paved the way for the national liberation of the countries of South and Southeast Asi i Thus, the I N A formed the mainstream of our national struggle in its final phase It remains a beaconlight in the present struggle of the Indian people for the establishment of a new social order fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the broad masses of our people

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REVOLT OF THE RATINGS OF THE ROYAL INDIAN NAVY

B C DUTT

Indians wanted to harbour no animosity towards the British after the transfer of power So with the hauling down of the union jack India buried some of the facts that helped in making our independence a reality

The story of Netaji's Indian National Army inspired the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy Many of the ratings who took part in the campaign for liberating Burmah from the Japanese occupation in 1944/45 had heard about Netaji Subhas and his Indian National Army Some of us had seen them after the fall of Rangoon I had taken part in the campaign as a leading telegraphist in 21 Beach Signal Section

After we were brought back to HMIS Talwar which was the base for the communication ratings, I tried to organise an underground movement with the object of throwing the British out of the sub-continent. I found many like minded anti British ratings in the Talwar

In the course of one of the many subversive activities in the Talwar I was arrested I had written Quit India and Jai Hind on the dias specially erected for the commander in-chief to take salute

The authorities held me in solitary confinement for 17 days During this time they held intensive enquiry to locate my associates Finally they decided to dismiss me from the service with disgrace They released me from the solitary confinement on February 16 1946 when they had taken the decision to dismiss me They released me from the solitary confinement but let me stay in the Talwar barracks with the other ratings until the orders were finally signed and returned from Delhi Headquarters

We worked through the nights among the ratings The result took the British by surprise on February 19 1946 The ratings

burst on the national scene like a time bomb This sort of thing did not happen in the fighting forces in British India—not after 1857 The event filled the British rulers with dark forebodings

The national leaders treated the RIN ratings as unwelcome intruders After the Congress leaders returned to the national scene from their enforced retirement during the Second World War they and the British both appeared ready for the conference table This to the Indian National Congress was hardly the time for a trial of strength least of all a violent confrontation

Bombay was the storm centre Most of the important shore establishments were situated in and around the city Many of the R I N ships also happened to be in the harbour The ratings broke out of the barracks shouting Jai Hind on February 19 1946 Within 24 hours workers were on the street fighting the Tommies

It had a quaint reaction among the major political parties In the workers reaction the Communists discovered their own brand of revolutionary tradition They supposed that there had to be Communist elements behind the uprising itself The Congress was upset for different reasons To it the meddlesome young fools seemed to upset their political applecart The Muslim League leader Moh Ali Jinnah addressed himself to the Muslim ratings

A few of us who had helped channelise the prevalent general discontent into a mutiny and tried to use it as a weapon against the foreign rule, felt embittered by the attitude of the political leaders who had no qualms in reducing it to a mere food riot We were angry and contemptuous of them We were also ashamed of our own inability for we were forced to carry the mutiny to the wrong conclusion After that we had little to be proud of and we wanted to forget the whole shabby business

We had the chance to speak when we were invited to give evidence later at the public inquiry Our well placed friends who had been associated with us in our underground work would have got into difficulty if we had revealed the political character of the mutiny We were advised against it It was a piece of advice we did not need Discrimination bad food bad service conditions general discontent yes—but no politics We stuck

to that story while giving evidence before the Inquiry Commission

It looked by then as if India was likely to get independence any way There was neither the need nor the likelihood of anyone trying to repeat what we had tried, at least not for a long time Why let our lost cause and our shame besmear the reputation of the leaders? We revealed nothing

The *Inquiry Commission dug up a lot of facts but it got little* of our politics What was our politics? It was so simple that 35 years after independence it would sound like the politics of simpletons Perhaps that is what it was This introduction is necessary for the generation born after '47 to understand the reason for this part of the history of our freedom struggle being suppressed

It happened 35 years ago The ratings of the HMIS 'Talwar' the signal school of the RIN, a shore establishment situated at Colaba, Bombay streamed out of the mess hall without eating their breakfast It was 8 00 A M on February 18 1946 The food was poor and inadequate From somewhere, the slogan was heard No food No work Sixteen hundred ratings of the Talwar had crossed the line

Two junior Indian officers came round to find out what it was all about To us the Indian officers with rare exceptions were no better than their 'white' counterparts They were booked away The authorities were puzzled Nothing like this had happened before in the RIN

We had a clear five hours without further interference from the authorities By the time the highest brass in Bombay, Rear-Admiral Rattray, Flag Officer, came to the Talwar at about 1 P M, it was too late Even the wavering elements had been won over All were set to see the thing through to the bitter end

Rattray made a sane move He came directly to the ratings He offered to replace Commanding Officer King, the most unpopular man, with Captain Inigo-Jones He was even prepared to look sympathetically into the question of food But he was five crucial hours too late By 4 30 p m, all the officers had left the Talwar.

On February 18, the Talwar stood defiant but alone and utterly helpless We did not have access to even a serviceable rifle Somehow, we had to get support from the seamen from the nearby shore establishment, Castle Barracks Some of the Talwar ratings went to work on them

The next day, February 19, the seamen and the stokers who man the guns and run the ships broke out of the barracks They marched towards the Talwar On their way through the main thoroughfare of the city, they chased the foreigners within sight, stoned the foreign-owned shops and pulled down the American flag at the U S I S Library The British owned evening paper screamed in banner headlines R I N Ratings Run Amok

No one so far had tried to curb the activities of the ratings By sundown, the Talwar was no longer alone Nearly 20 000 ratings from all the 11 shore establishments in Bombay and all the ships in the harbour had hauled down the Union Jack In a little over 48 hours, the British had lost all control over a complete unit of their Indian fighting forces The strike had spread to 74 ships, four flotillas and 20 shore establishments, including four major bases It was total The pattern of the mutiny was by and large the same, on every ship and establish ment The strike of the communications ratings on the Talwar, the "eyes and ears" of the Navy, and the seamen from Castle Barracks had a telling effect on the vacillating elements

As for the authorities, they had no precedent to guide them All the Commanding Officers reacted more or less in the same manner as the Commanding Officer of the Talwar, Commander King Commander King's approach was a despicable one He offered to make me an officer if I could pacify the ratings He did that because after my release from the solitary confinement I had become a hero to the ratings of H M I S Talwar I was amazed by his offer But seeing his panic stricken face I offered to help him to sit with the representatives of the ratings and talk things over But by the time I could round up a few of my associates and return to his office he had left the Talwar They either tried to speak directly to the ratings or sent their Indian deputies on pacifying missions and then deserted their posts The senior ratings, the Chief Petty Officers and the Petty Officers who could have restrained the ratings and probably

scotched the strike assumed neutral postures Most of them had varying degrees of sympathy for the ratings fight Quite a few of them openly joined us

By dusk on February 19 a Naval Central Strike Committee was formed to co ordinate and direct the activities of the various units outside the Talwar The Committee s strength varied from 12 on the first day to 36 on the last New members were co opted as units sent in their elected representatives

The ratings came from widely different regions and religions Some were from Punjab and the far North There were men from the South and Eastern India We were all more or less of the same origin Most of us were teen agers when we joined the Navy at the beginning of the war Few of us were from metropolitan centres Until I joined the R I N I had not even seen an Englishman My people lived in the countryside I had not seen any town larger than our district headquarters Service in the Navy had opened up the world before me Frankly, I enjoyed the experience What had turned us from loyal service men into rebels?

It was the result of a chain of events spread over the long dark days The mental metamorphosis some of us had gone through during the four to six years with the R I N was possible only when one was young and lived through a war By the end of the war none of us was the village rustic recruited at the beginning of the hostilities

We had taken over the R I N When the chaos and confusion of the first day was over we set about bringing some cohesion and order into the ranks Leading Signalman M S Khan wheat-complexioned Muslim from Upper Punjab and Petty Officer Telegraphist Madan Singh a tall lean Sikh were unanimously elected President and Vice President respectively Both were under 25 neither had any political experience having joined the R I N straight from school They were fluent speakers in English Hindustani and Punjabi Both were from the Talwar They were completely free of the communal virus that infected Indian public life of the time

I had a place in the Naval Central Strike Committee whose seat was the Talwar A special code was evolved for inter communication between ships and shore establishments We

made use of the wireless set No ship or establishment waited to hear of the strike in the Talwar from the AIR The AIR and the press made the news known to the general public

We renamed the Royal Indian Navy as the Indian National Navy A set of objectives was formally drawn up besides the improvement of our service conditions these included release of all Indian political prisoners and the INA personnel withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia, etc The NCSC adopted a resolution declaring that hence forth the ratings of the Indian National Navy will take orders only from the national leaders

That was our politics Where did it lead us?

The whole country heard of our take-over Our intentions were widely circulated Yet none of the national leaders made the slightest effort to send us greetings or directives Those of us who had conspired for the last five months to capture the Navy for the nation felt uneasy For the first time in months we felt confused Had we done something wrong? Why were the leaders silent?

The NCSC decided to approach Smt Aruna Asaf Ali a Left wing Congress leader then who happened to be in Bombay To some of us she resembled the legendary Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi who personally led her soldiers against the British during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 Our action fitted her public pronouncements

Many of us expected Smt Aruna Asaf Ali to lead us in the battle against the British She merely advised us to remain calm This sounded like the language of the Mahatma It did not make sense to us The Navy was under our control We had indications that the Army and the Air Force would soon fall in step with us At such a critical moment Smt Asaf Ali sat down to explain the legal loopholes in our demands According to her primarily we had mixed political demands along with our service grievances So she asked us to separate the two and formulate your service demands for submitting to the naval authorities

But Madam now who are the authorities she was told She understood that the ratings were not seeking her guidance to draw up their demands and promptly directed us to see the highest Congress authority in Bombay Sardar Vallabhbhai

Patel,' because (according to her clarifications to the Press later) 'what they (the ratings) sought was the support of the national forces for their just cause'

She had more pressing business in hand, which took her away from Bombay soon after But she did not forget the poor ratings She sent a telegram to Shri Nehru telling him that his presence was necessary as he alone could save Bombay' Her telegram was a neat summing up of the leaders attitude toward our efforts The men to whom we looked for leadership thought nothing of the uprising Sardar Patel treated us as a "bunch of young hotheads messing with things they had no business in The leaders, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, were busy jockeying for position for the take-over From nowhere a lot of 'young fools" had appeared and were expecting a lead We were such babes in the political woods that a simple fact did not strike us *That we could not start a revolution with the hope of being led by the people who believed only in reform and non-violent non-cooperation*

Khan and some members of the NCSC went from one leader to another They received much gratuitous advice Some 'fair-minded politicians' even advised Khan to solicit the support of the Muslim League

Things started going wrong as soon as we looked up to the leaders and waited for them for answer to our Where do we go from here?' The streets of Bombay resounded to the ratings' slogan calling for national unity "Hindu Muslim Ek Ho" and "Inquilab Zindabad' They carried Congress and League flags tied together to symbolise national unity To us in 1946 it was the differences between the Congress and the League which seemed to be holding up India's independence

On February 20, the heady wine of freedom had run down a little The NCSC now knew that the national leaders had no use for them The choice before them was simple to go it alone or to do a bit of horsetrading for the few extra crumbs of comfort in the service Debates went on in the Central Committee Outside the Committee room the ratings waited and talked, talked and waited

Meanwhile, the authorities were rapidly emerging from their brief paralysis The Flag Officer Commanding R I N Vice

Admiral Godfrey (FOCRIN was the highest authority in the Navy) reached Bombay at noon by when the great debate on the Talwar had petered out Many Central Committee members were anxious to talk things over with FOCRIN A negotiating Committee headed by Khan decided to meet him

Our first mistake had been to rely upon the national leaders The moment FOCRIN appeared on the scene we blundered into our second mistake The militant section helplessly watched Khan proceed hopefully to the conference table Few realised that the high tide of the movement had passed as soon as the negotiating committee faced FOCRIN across the table After that we stumbled on one blunder after another until the surrender flag was hoisted at 6 A M February 23

The Committee returned with a request from FOCRIN that all ratings should 'return to their respective ships and establishments by 3 30 p m Military police vans started picking up the ratings found in the street They were not arrested but were sent back to the barracks The offensive had begun but the authorities were proceeding cautiously Armed guards appeared at all the gates in the evening The ratings resented them The Committee tried to impress on the authorities to withdraw the guards and "strongly appealed to the comrades wherever they may be to maintain complete calm and solidarity and refuse to be stampeded into any kind of violent action"

The negotiating committee met FOCRIN at Rattray's bungalow FOCRIN made an astute move He agreed to meet all the demands concerning food at once But he was not prepared to discuss any other demands He was on solid ground After all he had no authority to discuss matters relating to politics, the ratings had no business either The Admiral had heard of the attitude of the political leaders He could even count upon their sympathy once he conceded the demands for better quality food and promised to consider the other demands relating to service He was playing for time But he took a chance he refused to remove the armed guards

The Admiral was not yet in a position to mount an assault Hence subtle manoeuvres We had no reason to feel helpless *He still had the ships guns* After a long session the NCSC finally decided to reject the offer of better food The ratings,

it decided must abide by the wishes of the national leaders They had advised us to remain calm, non-violent and negotiate with the authorities and also drop our political demands

Under the circumstances, a hunger strike appeared a suitable weapon We did not realise that we were not trained in that kind of warfare nor did we have the benefit of guidance from the supreme master of the technique, Mahatma Gandhi Non-violence was too sophisticated a thing for us And so we went headlong into our third mistake Instructions were sent to the ratings everywhere that if the guards were not withdrawn by dawn, 'go on a lying down strike from 7 30 a m tomorrow No violence in words or deeds

February 21 dawned unobtrusively The newspapers had reported a call for a general strike by some political parties of the Left The Congress had issued a statement against it The ratings could still go out of the Talwar and the dockyard inspite of the guards

At 9 A M Indian soldiers opened fire on the ratings in Castle Barracks With the first shot, the resolution of non-violence went up in smoke The ratings rushed to "action station"

The Indian soldiers were under the command of British officers The ratings addressed the soldiers over the loud-speaker, calling them brothers and told them that they were not merely fighting for themselves but they were fighting for the country s freedom, that is for them, too After that Indian soldiers refused to fire and they had to be withdrawn

By the time the British launched the next attack at 11 A M the ratings were at battle positions and Castle Barracks had been made ready to stand the siege

On hearing the news of the attack on Castle Barracks, Khan decided to shift the seat of the Committee to a more convenient site It shifted to the Narbada, the flagship of the R I N She became the temporary operational headquarters All ships in the harbour were instructed to "raise steam and prepare for action' They were told they might have to take up battle positions around the whole city of Bombay This might be necessary "to defend our ships and our dockyard"

The message was intercepted by the attackers Both the authorities and some of the national leaders later used it as a

batton to beat the ratings with They accused us of planning to blow up the city

Every attempt of the Tommies to gain entry either into the dockyard or Castle Barracks was repulsed The ships fired mostly at the threatened areas with Oerlikons Sporadic small arms firing and sometimes grenades went on till 2 30 P M when FOCRIN was heard over All India Radio He said, " overwhelming forces at the disposal of the Government would be used to the uttermost even if it meant the destruction of the Navy ' A message was also received by the NCSC that FOCRIN would like to discuss the situation A 'cease fire" was ordered by the Committee Khan sent out the message to the ships I hope you will be non violent I am meeting FOCRIN "

The ratings waited near their guns By then there was total confusion in their thinking They were no longer controlling events but had become pawns in the hands of other forces None among them was fit to change the course of their foundering cause News came that the authorities were discussing the situation with the national leaders The ratings waited behind the guns while leaders were fighting their "case ' with the naval brass

Besides the interested parties at the conference table, there were many other forces at work during this confused period of truce Prime Minister Attlee announced in the British Parliament that Royal Navy vessels were steaming full speed to Bombay General Headquarters at Delhi announced that "strong naval and military reinforcements are on their way to Bombay, Karachi and Poona", the trouble centres The aged sloop the Hindustan in Karachi, was shooting it out with the Tommies Royal Indian Air Force units stationed in Bombay and Poona had gone on strike All the same, the day which began with the sound of gunfire ended with legal wrangling

At 11 A M on February 22 Rattray went on the air with FOCRIN's statement They had received the desired reinforcements at last He read out the ultimatum "I told you yesterday that ample forces are available to restore order Should you now have decided in accordance with my warning to surrender unconditionally, you are to hoist a black flag or a

blue flag and muster all hands on deck on the side facing Bombay city and await further orders'

Sardar Patel's message came in the evening 'In the present unfortunate circumstances that have developed the advice of the Congress to the R I N is to down arms and to go through the formality of surrender which has been asked for" President Khan relayed the message to all ships and establishments with the Committee's request to accept the advice of Sardar Patel

For the first time since the Committee was elected, the majority of the ships refused to obey In view of the general protest the ships were asked to send their spokesmen to the Talwar to thrash it out Thirtysix members assembled at 1 A M on the Talwar The ratings everywhere waited in breathless silence No one slept Khan gave an extempore report of his talks with the leaders and the authorities and ended with a personal appeal for surrender His eyes were filled with tears Members seemed stunned by the picture Khan portrayed for them There were a few minutes of silence Then pandemonium broke out All were on their feet No one listened to anyone The general mood was 'To hell with the leaders the people are with us they are fighting the Tommies in the street let us join them just once more for the sake of the country, for our sake

Khan and Madan Singh listened in silence I watched Khan tears were streaming down his face At last he stood up and appealed for silence He asked them to keep faith They had decided to take orders only from the national leaders If they disobeyed now they would be guilty of breach of faith What was worse, they would be accused of political ambitions Their only ambition was to serve in the Navy of independent India The members were silent They hesitated None had any more words to match the mood and to fight the dilemma

A messenger brought Jinnah's message "I offer my services unreservedly for the cause of the R I N men to see that justice is done to them I appeal to the men of the R I N to call off the strike particularly I call upon the Muslims to stop "

Khan was immediately on his feet "Now we should have no hesitation Both the national organisations have pledged

support They did not unite even for the defence of the I N A. personnel We have won,' etc

Some felt the way he felt Others were dismayed at the communal approach implicit in Jinnah's support We had presented a united front through the four battling days Jinnah's statement was calculated to split our ranks

Flags of surrender were to go up at 6 A M and the time was nearly 5 A M when the vote was taken We decided to surrender Before dispersing we collected all the records every scrap of paper that had been used by the members of NCSC and consigned them to the flames At that time we just wanted to destroy all evidence of our miserable failure A year and a half later on the night of August 14, 1947 when Jawaharlal Nehru was proclaiming 'Long years ago we made a tryst with d stiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge R I N Mutiny had become an inconvenient national memory

I am happy that 35 years after people have remembered and have not only forgiven our failure but have invited me to write about our triumph and tragedy

ROYAL INDIAN NAVY AND THE NAVAL MUTINY (1946)

ANIL ROY

KARACHI CHAPTER

"Every person subject to this Act, who will join in a mutiny will suffer death or such other punishment as is hereinafter mentioned' Thus warned the Naval Code—The holy scripture of the R I N ratings Almost once in every month, the barrack officer, usually of the rank of a Lieutenant would come and solemnly recite the above lines In a graver voice he would go on expounding about the "such other punishment" that contained in that bulky volume The devils, for whom the scripture was meant stood in perfect attention without any visible reaction on their faces Once they heard the call to rise and mutiny' they swarmed around to settle scores with their foreign masters This is the saga of the Naval mutiny of 1946—the fitting finale of our freedom struggle The author of this article is one of the fortunate few who was ordered to be courtmartialled for the offence of having led the mutiny in Karachi, in February 1946 three days after the mutiny in Bombay As I have with me the whole set of documents which the Naval authorities forwarded to me in my Detention Camp at Malir near Karachi I would like to take the liberty of quoting from them, whenever it is necessary

My other two Comrades Hiralal from Ajmer in Rajasthan and Akbar Ali from Gujarat in West Pakistan were also ordered to be tried by courtmartial But none of us suffered death because the rulers did not want to disturb the preparations going on behind the scene for the transfer of power So I received a cryptic note from the Judge Advocate of the R I N in the 2nd week of June, before the scheduled date of my trial "Take notice that the orders given for your trial by courtmartial is withdrawn' The orders for courtmartial against Hiralal and Akbar Ali were also withdrawn

It would be worthwhile to acquaint my readers with the structure and composition of the Royal Indian Navy during the years of the Second Great War When the war broke out His Majesty s Royal Indian Navy had only 5 sloops in its possession —Hindustan, Indus Cornwallis Clive and Lawrence In addition the establishment consisted of one patrol vessel—Pathan one survey ship—Investigator one target towing trawler—Madras and one non sea going depot ship—Dalhousie The total strength of personnel of the whole Navy was barely 2000 At the end of the Second World War the R I N had 23 shore establishments

The new ratings H M I S training centre at Akbar was a horrible place Truck loads of ratings were brought and deposited here from morning till evening They had to collect their kit bags—the all time companion till death or discharge They were to forget completely about their civilian identity Anything that grew in His Majesty s Indian Soil was cooked and passed on as vegetarian dish Similarly flesh of any quadruped domesticated animal went on as non vegetarian dish

It was from H M I S Talwar the clarion call to rise against imperialism was first sounded It was situated at Colaba in Bombay city The ratings were divided into three Watches — Red White and Blue The Watch that performed the various duties of the day was called the duty watch The next was called the standy watch and the third the liberty watch which meant that they were allowed to go on leave for the day from 9 A M to 10 P M

The usual daily routine was physical training at 0600 hours breakfast at 0800 fall in at 0900 classes from 0930 till 1630 hours with an hour s break for lunch Tea and dinner were served at 1700 and 1830 hours respectively Everybody waited for the turn of his liberty watch when one could go out to breathe freely One thing that I remember vividly about Talwar was the shameless and loathsome hullabaloo which the white officers and ratings of the Royal Navy along with their sweet hearts and the W A C (I) indulged in our living blocks occasionally in the name of ball dance As the ratings had no other way of ventilating their grievances they never failed to use those common epithets directed against the womenfolk of their oppressors Almost ninety per cent of the ratings of this establish

ment came from the lower middle class families and almost an equal percentage of them were in their teens The exorbitant rise in the prices of essential commodities famines and the merciless exploitation of the rulers during the War left many people in utter economic ruin and a vast number of boys from these families were forced to join the fighting forces The whole nation was now groaning under the ruthless suppression of the British Raj

I stayed in Talwar for about eight months till my training was over Then I was transferred to HMIS Chamak in Karachi via castle Barrack at Bombay There were altogether five Shore Establishments in Karachi These were HMIS Monze—Local Naval Defence Base HMIS Himalaya—Gunnery School HMIS Bahadur—Boys Training School HMIS Dilwar—Boys Training School HMIS Chamak—Radar Training School All these establishments were situated in an Island called Manora At the far south of Karachi city was the Kemari Jetty Manora was separated from the city by a small inlet of the Arabian Sea

I arrived at Chamak in the month of June A few days after my arrival there I discovered that there were a number of boys who had been members of the All India Students Federation in their student life They came mostly from Bengal and the erstwhile princely state of Travancore Cochin It took no time for us to know each other most intimately We were about twenty in number Most of those ratings were Radar Trainees except a few who were Radio Mechanics Soon we discovered that we could do something more than killing our time in the way we were doing As the month of August was approaching we decided to hold a cultural function on the 7th of August on the occasion of the death anniversary of Rabindra Nath Tagore After consulting my friends I put up an application and was called by the Commanding Officer He refused permission to hold an open function but said that he would not mind if it was confined to only twenty to twentyfive boys in a classroom We did hold the function with Chief Petty Officer Khan as the President This incident instead of dampening our spirit encouraged us for further ventures

The Bengali community in Karachi used to celebrate Durga-puja on the lawns of Mama Parsi Girls School We contacted the Puja committee to allot some time to us for a variety programme and readily got their permission The programme was held on the second day of the Puja Subsequently we assembled at the beach one Sunday afternoon, and formed the Sailors Association, Manora Our first task was to raise funds for contributions towards the INA Relief Fund I want to make it quite clear that we never tried for a mutiny in Karachi or to prepare the ground for such a mutiny That would have been an impossible task The Island was separated from the mainland with very little arrangement for ferrying men and materials We had hardly any arms worth the name in Chamak and Himalaya to hold on even for twentyfour hours Naturally our intention was only to spread anti-British feeling among the ratings The refusal of the C O to give us permission to hold the function in connection with the death anniversary of Tagore was resented by everybody Equally unpopular was the measure taken by Lord Louis Mountbatten, the C in C of the allied forces in South-East Asia, in forbidding the Armed Personnel to contribute towards the INA Relief Fund Meanwhile I had a new friend from the Air Force, Sergeant Sharma to assist me in Radio Telephone Soon I discovered that Sharma was no less anti-British than many of us The service condition in the Air Force was also no better than what we had in the R I N The Airmen in their stations were also a thoroughly dissatisfied lot

The news of the Bombay Mutiny reached Chamak and other establishments on the morning of 19th February through newspapers It was received with tremendous excitement and suppressed jubilation Breakfast was over, and everybody was preparing for the morning fall in at 0900 We overheard hurried group discussions in hushed voices about the action we should take The authorities did not show any sign of nervousness Considering the topography of Manora Island they must have thought that the ratings would never risk a mutiny The new commanding officer did not mention anything about the Mutiny in Talwar on the morning fall in on 19th February It seemed from the surface that everything was in order At lunch break we gathered all the ratings of Chamak who were members of

the Sailors Association and told them to contact the other members from Himalaya Bahadur and Menze and inform them of an emergent meeting at a particular spot on the sea beach at 2000 hours We deliberately excluded the kids of Dilwar

The seabeach was full of ratings from all the establishments The atmosphere was tense The very first question that I asked them was whether they all agreed to join in a mutiny To this there was no second opinion The next question was when should we start the mutiny? To this there was no unanimity at the beginning Some wanted to start the mutiny right from the same mid night (19th February) Others wanted to start the mutiny from the morning of the next day (20th February) But the majority was in favour of the morning of 21st February I also liked the idea of starting the mutiny on the 21st My argument was that we must try to carry with us the ratings of all the establishments including the ratings of Hindustan Travancore As soon as the date was finalised the programme for the 21st was chalked out This was

(i) To assemble at Kemari Jetty at 1000 hours

(ii) To take out a procession through the streets of Karachi in support of the ratings of Talwar

(iii) To invite the Dock workers of the Kemari Jetty to join in the procession

(iv) Shouting of slogans denouncing the British Imperialists and urging the Congress and the Muslim League to unite

(v) Complete abstention from work

(vi) The ratings of Bahadur to march over at Chamak and the ratings of these two establishments to proceed jointly to Kemari.

Ten ratings were selected at Leaders of their respective establishments The responsibility of informing Hindustan and Travancore fell on the ratings of Himalaya It was decided that work should be carried out as silently as possible The group leaders of Himalaya Chamak and Bahadur were asked to inform the ratings who were allotted sentry duties on that night to keep their eyes open and to report back to them After deciding to assemble on the same spot again on 20th

February at 2000 hours we dispersed in small batches I had five other room mates After telling them briefly what transpired at the meeting, I asked for their opinion They approved wholeheartedly of all our decisions

The day broke—the 20th day of February 1946—but there were no pipe calls to wake up the ratings The morning papers, particularly, the *Sind Observer,* carried the news of the dramatic turn the Bombay mutiny was taking The ratings were still discussing things when all of a sudden came shrill sounds The ratings fell in The commanding officer broke the news of the Bombay mutiny officially and warned us as threateningly as he could The parade was dismissed The ratings went to their duties When I entered my R/I room, I found Sgt Sharma already sitting there It was the day for exercise with an Aircraft, which was to start at 1000 hours The very first question Sharma asked me was what we were going to do I told him 'tomorrow' Then I put a counter question Won t you do anything ? Of course, we will", but don't know when, and how Can you continue for a week ? 'It is difficult to predict, for, we don t know how things will move Our most difficult problem is that we are cut off from the mainland But rest assured we will hold on as long as we can Lt Brown entered into the room and announced that there would be no exercise and told Sgt. Sharma to leave Sharma got up and said in Hindi 'Aagey Barna Dost, Hum pichhey rahenge—move forward my friend, we will be behind you' A class was in progress All of a sudden a member of the S A from Himalaya came stealthily into my room He told me that the ratings of Hindustan wanted to start the mutiny on 20th February as they had orders to leave Karachi on the morning of the 21st I told him that the ratings of Hindustan were the best to decide on their own course of action As the rating was to leave and both of us turned about, I saw Sub Lt Macfarlane doing something on a Radar set Any way he did not know a word of Hindi Macfarlane did not tell me anything and left the room But the cunning fellow did not forget to mention it in his evidence as a prosecution witness

During lunch break, the ratings from Himalaya came and we learnt from them that the ratings of Hindustan had driven away

all the officers, both British and Indian from their ship and had taken full control of the ship themselves Thus Hindustan got the distinction of heralding the mutiny in Karachi The members of the S A met at the same spot and at the same time as on the previous night We concentrated only on the next day's programme The first point of discussion was writing of slogans on the walls and preparing posters As far as possible, the slogans were to be written in Hindi and in Urdu We chose about eight slogans (1) Ratings of Himalaya—Unite, (2) Ratings of Chamak—Unite (3) Ratings of Bahadur—Unite, (4) Hindustan Zindabad, (5) Down with British Imperialism, (6) Shed blood to get freedom (7) We shall live as a free nation, (8) Tyrants your days are over

It was decided that the ratings of Himalaya would proceed from their own Jetty while the ratings of Chamak and Bahadur would proceed from Manora Jetty The ratings of Himalaya should have with them the ratings of Hindustan and Travancore and all would assemble just outside the Jetty at about 1030 hours The ratings of Chamak and Bahadur would join them by 1000 hours As was decided earlier the Bahadur ratings were to come over at Chamak by 0900 hours We also decided to observe a complete hunger strike to show our sympathy for those who were killed in the Bombay mutiny

At last the night was over The morning sky was filled with slogans of hundreds of vigorous youthful voices The ratings of R I N in Manora had mutinied Ratings went on fearlessly in groups of 50, 100 200 shouting slogans and asking other ratings to come out of their rooms I went to the Parade ground along with my friends at 0830 hours Many ratings had already assembled and many were still coming The C O started frightening the ratings by saying that the military had taken possession of the whole of Kemari Jetty and whoever would try to go to Kemari would be shot dead Before he could finish his speech the Bahadur boys entered Then with shouting of slogans, we left Chamak a little before 1000 hours All through the streets the shouting of slogans continued The small inhabitants of Manora never saw a scene like that before They cheered us by clapping Some even joined us in slogan shouting We were

now at the Manora Jetty The most heartening job was done by the local boatmen who not only made a number of trips to ferry the ratings but refused to take any money from us Their only request was 'Zalimoko mar dalo' kill the tyrants We reached Kemari at about 11 30 Hundreds of British troops were deployed there They had completely cordoned off Hindustan and were standing three deep on every road leading towards the city We surveyed the situation for about an hour, then noticed the ratings of Himalaya standing a few yards away from us on the Jetty They said that while they were crossing the inlet from Himalaya Jetty in motor boats and country boats some British troops in motor boats suddenly appeared from the eastern side of Kemari Jetty and ordered them to go back When they did not heed to their orders they began to fire So they all tried to reach Hindustan for protection A volley of bullets were showered on a motor boat which was very close to Hindustan killing two of our comrades instantly and wounding some When the ratings of Hindustan saw their friends in distress they started firing at the British troops with twelve pounders forcing the enemies to retreat As the dead bodies and the wounded were taken to Hindustan, about three to four hundred ratings of Himalaya followed them

We made hurried consultations among ourselves about our next course of action The first point was whether we should try to break the military cordon Many said that it would be a futile attempt We stood about 10 deep and started shouting slogans The Dock workers gladly joined in our demonstration and shouted slogans with us with equal vehemence The British troops thought that we were trying to break off their cordon Some lied on the ground with their fingers on the triggers of sten guns Others pointed their rifles and machine guns at us We demonstrated there for about two hours at a stretch then sat down Many reporters approached us I took a young reporter of *Sind Observer* aside and told him whether he could try to collect some information about Hindustan He agreed to try, came back after about an hour and told us that one Lt Bhandari of Hindustan was manhandled by the British troops as he tried to enter into the Ship and was taken away. He could not say

anything about the dead or wounded as even the reporters had no access into the ship It was nearing 1500 hours We decided to hold an open meeting in Chamak at 1830 hours The Bahadur boys were asked to leave along with the ratings of Chamak and Himalaya leaving only about 200 ratings with us Our intention was to be there as long as we could to collect some more information about Hindustan The ratings of Bahadur were asked to come over to Kemari Jetty by 0930 or 1000 hours More civilians were present now on the other side of the road The military did not budge an inch We kept them guessing about our next move for another two hours In the meantime we tried our best to have some sort of contact with Hindustan but did not succeed

It was past 1700 hours We had to return to our establishments to attend to the meeting at 1830 So we told the Dock workers that we would be meeting them again at the Jetty tomorrow between 0930 and 10 A M for demonstrations They were full of enthusiasm After exchanging 'Lal Salam' with them we came back to our establishments We found that many of the members of the S A were waiting for us in our room We sat down to decide about what we should tell the ratings in the meeting They should be told about the days happenings A commission of Enquiry should be instituted to find out why the military opened fire Compensation should be demanded for those killed and wounded Lt Bhandari was to be released and the proposed hunger strike was to be called off

The meeting was organised in front of the open space before the Chamak canteen At the end of my speech, I asked Salim, a member of the S A to translate my speech into Urdu Salim not only did that very ably but made his speech more forceful by injecting Urdu couplets appropriately Jagdish and Bedi also spoke after Salim and the meeting terminated at about 2000 hours

Roughly from 2100 hours the relay slogan shouting started Each block was allotted about 10 minutes time and there were 6 living blocks in Chamak When the last block stopped, the first block started again When it was about 2200 hours about six or seven ratings from Himalaya came with two disturbing

items of news An ultimatum had been sent to Hindustan by the British Army to surrender by 1000 hours failing which the ship would be fired upon The ebb tide of the sea would start from 0600 hours and would continue till mid-day My eyes fell on Kurian and all of a sudden an idea flashed in me We could send a message through the signalling Projector of Himalaya Kurian could do it The idea was immediately accepted The ebb tide would be as much of a disadvantage to them as it would be advantageous for the enemy They would not only be fighting from a superior ground position with enough of mobility but their adversaries would be entrapped in a ship far below the ground level I asked Kurian to write down the message It should be from S A Manora so that our friends from Himalaya who were already in Hindustan could know wherefrom the message had originated Kurian wrote the following message

DO NOT OPEN FIRE IN THE MORNING STOP EBB TIDE SHALL MEET YOU TOMORROW—OVER

It was now past 2300 hours Myself Kurian and three others from Himalaya went to the C O s Quarter I told him that perhaps he knew that Hindustan had been served with an ultimatum to surrender within 1000 hours the next morning I showed him the message and said that it would be just an attempt to dissuade them from firing and he must request Com Gush for permission to transmit the message from the Himalaya Signalling Projector Lt Com Chatterjee went in to change his dress came back after a few minutes then led us to the Quarter of the C O of Himalaya On reaching there he pressed the button of the calling bell Com Gush answered the call immediately He also didn t sleep Lt Com Chatterjee told him his name Com Gush called him in When Lt Com Chatterjee went in he took the message from us They were together for a few minutes then came out and without a word led us to the bridge where the projector was kept We climbed the staircase of a single storey building and came to the projector While Com Gush Lt Com Chatterjee and Kurian went to the projector we were asked to stand back

Kurian fixed the projector towards Hindustan Gush handed

over the message to Kurian There was no response from Hindustan Kurian went on Then suddenly the projector of Hindustan came to life Kurian stopped for a moment, went through the message and kept his eyes on it for quite some time The projector of Hindustan went on transmitting something Kurian raised his eyes from the message caught hold of the handle of the projector and started transmitting to which Hindustan replied Subsequently Kurian said how they changed the message We all thought that Com Gush did it It was only when I received my court martial papers that I came to know that it was Lt Com Chatterjee who did that He narrated this incident in his prosecution evidence

Lt Com Chatterjee inserted the line Observe complete non violence himself and also struck down ebb tide from our original message It was also interesting to note that Lt Com Chatterjee did not say a word about the reply of Hindustan to our message This was what Kurian received after transmission of his message 'Shall fire if fired stop You are welcome but not those white swines—Out'

In the morning of 22nd February 1946 all the ratings of Chamak assembled at Parade ground within 0830 hours ready to march towards Manora Jetty when we saw the ratings of Himalaya running towards us The British army had scared away all the boatsmen threatening to kill anybody who would come within a mile of Hindustan So our only hope was Kemari Jetty It took some time for all the ratings of Himalaya to come to the parade ground of Chamak We could only start after 0900 hours We almost ran towards Manora Jetty The picture was the same as in Himalaya Jetty After about half an hours waiting we found that five or six country boats with our friends in them coming towards Manora Jetty As soon as they arrived there was a scramble to get in them So we decided that roughly 100 ratings from Chamak and 100 from Himalaya would make the first trip This would be repeated when the boats came back again Suddenly we heard the roaring of cannons Three or four shells were fired in quick succession We know these were from Hindustan We shouted death to the tyrants The boatmen joined us There was no trace of fear on their faces We reached

Kemari a little before 1100 hours We heard with utter amaze ment that perhaps everything was over The British army opened fire at about 1000 hours and the firing continued for about half an hour While the British troops fired from behind the wagons they had arranged the night before and other advantageous positions the ratings of Hindustan could not see their targets They were trapped in the ship and were butchered mercilessly We rushed to an opening to go to Hindustan The British troops were standing like a wall with fixed bayonets pointing at us In choked voices we started shouting slogans Some screamed in utter despair while others went on striking their chests with both of their palms It was past 1200 hours when we heard the sound of moving trucks We knew that the ratings of Hindu stan were being taken away We came to attention and saluted the dead injured and living heroes of Hindustan

Our first battle was lost We were to fight more battles So we had to return to our establishments But before we left we hurled our last slogan to the British troops murderers your days are numbered The decision to go on hunger strike on the next day (23rd February) was announced at Kemari itself We bade farewell from the citizens of Karachi who assembled there and said Lal Salam' embracing us with tears in their eyes We returned to our establishments at about 1430 hours We found that the British troops of the Black Watch passing through Chiamak It was clear that they had taken over Manora Island and would now turn their eyes on us

They were not only patrolling Chiamak every hour but a good number of them were always in Chiamak They even followed us to our bathrooms with fixed bayonets I was asked by the ratings to go to the Duty Officer and inform him of our decision to go on hunger strike if British troops were not withdrawn im-mediately I was accompanied by Kurrun and Jagdish

A new slogan was added to our stock — Angrez Sipahi hatao— Varna Bagawat Chalegi Chalegi Remove the British troops otherwise the mutiny will continue continue We shouted slogans even after mid night

On 23rd February, there was not pipe call The British troops were doing their patrolling They were posted at every point of exit It was about 0900 hours when all the officers of Chamak came to our living blocks and requested us to assemble at the parade ground to listen to an important announcement of the C O We went to the parade ground The C O s speech was brief He said that the army authorities had complained to him that last night there was disturbance in the living blocks They would not be withdrawn if we continue with our slogan shouting But the moment we would be peaceful the British troops would be withdrawn Lt Brown asked me whether I would like to go to the funeral ground to perform the last rites of my Hindu friends who were killed in last day's firing I jumped on my feet He told me to take along with me a Christian friend as a Muslim and a Sikh would be coming from Himalaya I asked Kurian and he gladly agreed Before leaving Lt Brown told us to be ready and be present at the parade ground in about five minutes time We dressed up hurriedly and ran to the parade ground The cremation ground was on the outskirts of the city and it had no walls around it Seven dead bodies were brought down and placed side by side They were covered with a sheet of white cloth each We could not see their faces I could not hold myself any longer and burst into tears The bodies of the two Sikh friends were carried a few yards away Harjinder followed them So did the priests I was given water to wash my hands and feet and then sit down to perform the last rites of my unknown friends I asked the priests why they were not taking away the covers off their faces They said they were forbidden to do so as the faces must have been mutilated beyond recognition Harjinder had finished with his task much before me Kurian and Musa had also returned Musa said he had burned four bodies and Kurian three So there were 14 dead that we knew of We did now know how many of the wounded died later We came back to our establishments at about 1730 hours We decided to maintain absolute silence at night so that we could pressurise the C O for the withdrawal of the British troops In the morning of 24th February the officers came to the living blocks and requested the ratings to assemble at the parade ground at 0900 hours The C O came with other officers

and began addressing the ratings Instead of praising the ratings for maintaining calm on the previous night he scolded us for our indiscipline The military would never be withdrawn as long as commotion continued I was awfully agitated and angry I told others that I was going to the C O to scold him as he had scolded us We stormed into the room of the C O and rebuked him for having gone back on his earlier promise to get British troops withdrawn

We all were feeling a little better on 24th February as there was no hunger strike and we all had our breakfast in the morning But we were determined to continue with our mutiny till the British troops were not withdrawn So there could be no respite from slogan shouting Ultimately myself Bedi and Kurian were put under arrest The spirit of resistance though under heavy repression lived on

NOTE

The author presented important documents and newspaper writings which could not however be cited here for lack of space The following is a list of the same

Documents

1 Naval message—served upon A K Roy on 8 6 46
2 *Trial papers of accused A K Roy (R I N 197) 1946*
3 List of witnesses
4 Circumstantial letter from Lieut Commander C O of H M I S Chamak 27 5 46
5 Charge Sheet
6 Evidence of Lieut Commander A K Chatterjee
7 Additional evidence of Lieut Commander A K Chatterjee
8 Summary of evidence of Lieut J W Brown
9 Evidence of Lieut Rao

10 Summary of the evidence of Sub Lieut P W McFarlane
11 Summary of evidence of Lieut P T Hayward

Newspapers

1 *The Daily Gazette*, Karachi 1946
2 *The Times of India* 1946
3 *The Sind Observer*, 1946

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